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骸骨騎士

*Skelton Knight,
the pe...*

只今 異世界へ

お出掛け

OVERLAP

Skeleton Knight

vol.05: New Continent

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[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [uselessno4](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Illustrations



「ごめん、ごめんにやさしい……」

「死ぬところだったんだぞっ!!
家族を失う痛みを僕にまた味わわせる気がっ!!」

骸骨騎士様、
異世界へ
お出掛け中 V

*Skeleton Knight,
going out to the parallel universe*

Enoki Hakari 秤猿鬼 illust. KeG





焰よ舞い踊れ、
焰よ舞い散れ、

全ての物を、
全ての魂を塵へと還せ



Prologue

The Southern Continent beyond the Southern Sea.

While a majority of the continent remained unexplored by humans, the former united Leburan Empire had sent an expedition to settle the western cape of the continent.

After the empire had splintered into its western and eastern parts, the human colonies that had been built began to supply the mainland empires with highly valued spices and seasonings.

The largest and most prosperous of these human colonies had been the port city Tajiento.

A building that took up a considerable amount of space in the city was the main church of the Hiruku religion with an attached mansion, to which the two major piers lead to.

However, with its red-bricked mosaics and other flourishes, the architecture of this church was different from that of the mainland churches. The sheer height and size of the building eclipsed the rest of the city.

Even the mansion built next to the church was more exquisite than the residence of Tajiento's governor, who had been appointed by the Emperor himself.

In one of the three-story tall rooms of the mansion, an incredibly obese and rather ugly man was sitting in a chair with a displeased expression on his face.

The man's overweight physique well exceeded that of an ordinary man's, to the point where even the sturdy chair he sat in creaked whenever he moved.

The man's bald head, beady eyes and plump cheeks gave him a frog-like appearance as he stared down at the two men kneeling before him.

"In order to carry out the will of the Pope, I and the man behind me have been assigned to work under you, Charos-sama. We shall carry out the Pope's wish as Charos-sama desires."

The man dressed in the robes of a Hiruku priest gently smiled while maintaining a respectful bow toward the large man called Charos.

The man standing behind the priest was dressed in black and had lowered his head as well.

The frog-like man was one of the seven cardinals of the Hiruku religion, Charos Acedia Industria.

He was currently the highest-ranking representative of the Hiruku church on the Southern Continent.

“I understand, I understand! Carry out your duty unimpeded, and get that beast behind you out of this sacred place! Hurry and remove it from the premises before its foul stench taints this mansion!”

Charos glared at the man in black behind the priest as he urged the two men to leave with a wave of his hand.

The man wearing the black hood showed no reaction to the insult, but the long black tail growing out of his lower back did wave back and forth a bit.

Charos seemed displeased by this and snorted at the hooded man before turning to the priest.

However, when the two faced each other, the priest met the cardinal's foul mood with a smile and visible gratitude before he and the hooded man left the room.

Charos snorted again as he saw them leaving.

“I thought I could indulge a bit while being away from the noisy mainland, but I can't eat a thing if Tajiento collapses under my watch..... I've been here so long, though, that I have no idea what the Pope is thinking.”

Charos' massive protruding belly shook as he let out a grand sigh and became silent for a moment.

Suddenly Charos' stomach shook and he raised his head as if he'd thought of something good.

“That’s it! There are about 10,000 soldiers underneath this place, so it shouldn’t cost much to loan that man a hundred subordinates! That way Tajiento will be protected and I’ll be carrying out the Pope’s will. I really amaze myself with my own genius sometimes!”

Charos leaped from his chair with speed unexpected of his fat body while laughing a strange laugh after muttering his soliloquy and self-praise.

“Since it’ll be the church that prevents this decrepit Tajiento from falling into ruin, my reward should be rather substantial.”

In a coaxing voice this repulsive frog-like man continued to praise himself as he returned to his sleeping quarters and asked one of the servants to entertain him as he drifted off.

Chapter 1: New Problem

The Northern Continent, in a massive forest along the eastern tip.

Centuries ago, the elves escaped their human persecutors by fleeing into this vast forest. The elven village Raratoia was currently covered by the early morning mist, and few people were actually awake yet.

The mansion that sat in the center of the village differed greatly from the regular homes in Raratoia.

Glass windows had been cut into the tree-trunk below to the branches of an unbelievably large tree. The entire mansion was the fusion of a building and a tree, a fantastic example of the mysterious workings of this world, while also maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.

I had just woken up in one of the mansion's rooms that had been provided for me and was now sitting on my comfortable bed.

The clothes I was wearing had distinctively elven patterns sewn into them, but since they had been wrapped around my skeletal body they'd ended up becoming a little disheveled.

When I glanced into the full body mirror in the corner of the room, I saw blue lights sitting in the eye sockets of a human skull.

I've become very familiar with this body ever since I came to this world, but I still raised my hand and started making strange gestures just to confirm that it was really me I was looking at.

After that was done, I picked up the leather canteen of hot spring water I had placed next to my pillow the night before and began to drink from it.

The change in my body was almost instantaneous.

The skeleton I had been looking at in the mirror was replaced with a body that filled out the clothes when I drank the curse dispelling water.

The reflection of the strange looking skeleton was replaced with the visage of a browned-skinned, muscular man.

The man appeared to be in his mid-thirties and looked slightly Arabian with raven-black hair, a strong jaw, and stubble sprouting from his chin. However, the crimson eyes and the unnaturally long ears were not those of a human.

I started to move around to ease some of the stiffness in my shoulders.

“Hmm, there doesn’t seem to be any problems.”

I made that comment as I stood up in this still dark room.

There was a snoring, green fur ball lying on the bed whose tail fidgeted a bit when I stood up.

“Ponta’s still asleep.....”

The sixty-centimeter small, fox-like animal had patches of skin between her fore– and hind legs that were similar to those of a flying squirrel. She had been my companion ever since I saved her shortly after coming to this world.

Her back was covered in light green fur with a white underbelly that extended to the center of her tail. There was no sign of her waking up as her mouth opened and closed.

The suit of armor that I always wore to hide my skeletal body and a two-handed bastard sword were sitting in a corner. I thought about changing but decided against it before leaving the room.

In this world, people woke with the rising sun, so the mansion was still quiet because the day had yet to begin.

I could hear the chirping of the birds that nested in the tree as I cautiously walked across the wooden floor.

I went down to the second floor and took a peek inside the dining room, but no one was there.

“Well, I suppose it still too early.....”

When I scratched my head while staring at the unlit stove, a voice called out to me from behind.

“You’re quite an early riser today, Arc-kun.”

When I looked back I saw a young dark elven woman with shoulder-length, snow-white hair and golden eyes.

She looked puzzled as to why I was in the dining room and her arms were crossed under her ample bosom.

“Oh, Glenys-dono.”

She was the wife of Raratoia’s village elder and the acting elder while he was away on business.

“I was surprised to see an unknown person walking about.”

She giggled a little as she said that.

I usually walked around this place as a skeleton, believing that wandering around like that was bad for people’s hearts, but maybe she’d grown used to it.

At this point, the “cursed skeleton”-look had started to become
_____ Perhaps the cursed skeleton look was appealing in a broad sense.

“Really? By the way, why are you up so early?”

After looking up from my body when Glenys asked why I was up.

“Oh, that. I was wondering if the crewmen of the trade ship heading to the Fabuna’ha kingdom had given their permission yet? You could say it made me a little anxious.....”

Glenys was startled for a moment by my reply before she shrugged her shoulders.

“You do know that you can’t gain permission from other villages in a single day? Do you really want to go to the Southern Continent that badly?”

Her words made me feel like an elementary schooler that couldn’t wait for an

upcoming field trip, so I looked out a nearby window to hide my embarrassment.

I could see that the morning sunlight was starting to peek through the early morning haze.

“Huaa, good morning..... It’s a bit early isn’t it.”

When I heard the voice of another woman, I looked in the direction of its origin.

The yawning woman that was rubbing her eyes as she entered the room looked similar to Glenys.

She had the same snow-white hair, golden eyes and lilac skin as Glenys. Though her hair was longer, she greatly resembled her mother who was standing next to me.

Her name was Ariane Glenys Maple.

She was a warrior from the forest capital Maple and I’ve been in her care since shortly after I first came to this world.

“Good morning Ariane-dono.”

When I greeted the still yawning Ariane, Glenys clapped her hands together as if she had just thought of something.

“Since it’s gonna be a while until we hear anything about the trip to the Fabuna’ha kingdom and breakfast isn’t ready yet, how about you help Arc-kun with his swordsmanship Ariane?”

She turned towards Ariane with a smile on her face as she spoke.

“Yeah, I’d be really grateful if you could be my partner.....”

After signing off on Glenys’ suggestion I also turned towards Ariane and waited for her reply.

My current body was that of my former game avatar and it still had the high stats I amassed from playing, but my lack of actual combat training meant that I moved rather monotonously in battle, so the last time I sparred with Glenys I

was utterly defeated.

I had outstanding power and speed, but I couldn't follow a curve ball..... or something like that.

While I doubted there were all that many people with her level of talent in the world, it would be for the best to become more accustomed to combat.

Ariane sighed a bit as she sleepily patted down her hair before she answered.

"I see..... I don't want to work up too much of a sweat, but a light spar should be fine, right? Come on, Arc."

Ariane walked out of the dining room and gestured for me to follow.

I gave Glenys a slight nod and she sent me off with a big smile and a small wave.

After a bit of moving about, I stood in the mansion's backyard, facing Ariane with a wooden sword in hand.

As a warrior from Maple, Ariane's swordsmanship was obviously on a different level than my own.

Not to mention that she had been receiving her mother's training for all her life, while I've only just begun to develop my own fighting style.

While I wasn't yet at the stage where I could learn anything from sparring with Glenys, training with Ariane should make me a decent enough fighter.

Since I wasn't wearing the Holy Armor of Belenus today, my body felt light.

I tightened my hold on my wooden sword and quickly launched an attack at Ariane.

I'd thought without my armor I would be able to gain the upper hand using my speed, but Ariane managed to sidestep my attack at the last second and proceeded to launch a counterattack.

"Whoa!"

I jerked my body to avoid the attack and tried to fall back and regroup before attacking Ariane again.

However, she didn't overlook such an opening.

With minimal movement, she managed to launch an unexpected thrust at me.

“Ah!?”

I reflexively leaped back when I noticed her incoming attack.

I didn't intend to put so much power into the leap, but I realized that I was at least three meters away from Ariane.

In fact, when I looked back at Ariane I saw the dissatisfaction on her face as she stared at me with her sword lowered.

“Hey, wasn't that dodge a little bit exaggerated?”

“Uh, sorry. It's just.....”

I was still confused by my own actions but I apologized anyway.

Moving back towards Ariane, I resumed a fighting stance.

This time Ariane opened with an overhead strike, I managed to block the attack with my reflexes, but when I saw her sword heading toward the left side of my stomach after her fourth swing I haphazardly swung my sword around to block.

“Ahh!?”

“Normally you block attacks like this with minimal movement. Why are you overextending yourself so much?”

Ariane looked confused as she reviewed my unconvincing performance so far.

I wasn't trying to act any differently than I usually did, but my movements were rougher than normal.

After that, we went through the same routine again and again, but it was only after the effects of the spring water had worn off did my movements improved.

“It seems that something’s wrong with your true body, want to stop for today?”

Shaking my head I told Ariane, who was currently holding her sword over her shoulder:

“Please, one more bout, Ariane-dono.”

“Alright.”

I thought back to all our previous bouts as she readied herself.

While there wasn’t a major difference from our other bouts, I was more confident this time.

My gaze focused on the wooden sword in my skeletal hand.

“Here I come!”

With a spirited cry, I launched a diagonal slash.

Ariane managed to block the attack with the side of her sword and managed to slip inside my range and counter-attacked.

With a single swing, I managed to calmly block two of her attacks. However, while I had been dealing with those, she managed to shift her body to create a false opening that she could easily counterattack from.

Instead of falling into that trap, I tried to break the engagement and put some distance between us, but she anticipated that move and took a swing at me.

Ariane had a smile brimming on her face as we locked swords with one another.

“See, you can do it correctly.”

“Haa.”

It was Glenys shouting from a window that interrupted our mutually high spirits.

“Breakfast is ready.”

“Oka~y.”

With that comment, Ariane brought our spar to an end

“Whew, I’m totally starving right now.”

While Ariane was saying that and walking back to the mansion, I stayed and started to swing my sword around.

I was going over everything I’d learned from Ariane.

“There’s no doubt about it.....”

I sighed a bit as I said that.

When I regained my body, the emotions that accompanied attacking or being attacked were regained as well.

Whenever I was attacked, the sense of fear and dread that surged up stifled my reactions and made me overextend myself in my defense.

Rather obvious, if you think about it.

While I was a skeleton, my emotions were heavily repressed and I could calmly deal with attacks, but when my raw feelings returned together with my flesh-and-blood body, it was impossible to immediately access the situation and respond accordingly because I had no experience controlling my emotions in stressful situations.

As a skeleton I was always prepared for battle, no matter the circumstances, but I doubted I would grow as a fighter if I relied on that alone.

If I wanted to live with a body made of flesh and blood, then I would need to repeat the earlier part of the sparring session again and again until I learned to be calm under pressure.

“This is gonna be harder than I thought.....”

With that bit of grumbling, I looked up at the large tree as the wind rustled the branches above.

Chapter 2: Traveling is More Enjoyable with Company

Two days later.

Since I didn't have any urgent business, I collected more hot spring water to regain my body and spent my days sparring with Ariane, familiarizing myself with the village and learning how to control my emotions while fighting.

I would train with Ariane till noon, then practice a bit of swordsmanship with my elven body and end the day by exploring the village.

I never realized just how long a day could last or how productive I was without T.V., games or the internet.

Actually, I just got really bored if I didn't do something to pass the time.

That night, after I'd finished bathing in mansion's private tub and had sat down for dinner, Glenys told me about the matter concerning the travel permission.

"Landfria village has granted permission."

I rocketed out of my seat and forcefully approached Glenys when I heard the news.

"Ohh, is that true!? When does the ship set sail?"

"Calm down. There are a few conditions we need to discuss first."

Glenys held up her hand when she saw my exuberance.

"Conditions?"

Since I was boarding an elven trade ship to a beastman kingdom, it was important to hear any stipulations lest I cause a commotion, so I calmed down to hear her out.

“Apparently the two of you have a connection with the village elder and he would like to meet with you.”

This time it was Ariane who reacted to Glenys’ statement.

“Both of us?”

Glenys nodded at her question and continued to speak with a dubious look in her eyes.

“Apparently, the two of you have helped the elder’s older brother.”

Ariane and I shared a confused look when Glenys told us that bit of information.

If I was understanding this correctly, then both of us were somehow acquainted with the older brother of Landfria’s elder... However, neither Ariane or I could seem to figure out who that person was.

I haven’t talked to all that many elves outside of those in Raratoia, so I waited to see what Ariane had to say.

“I’ve never spoken to Landfria’s elder, nor someone who could be his older brother.....”

I tried to remember all of the elves I’ve met outside of the village but only one person came to mind.

Ariane’s golden eyes bulged as she realized the only person it could have been, and the two of us shouted at the same time:

“Casey!?” “Casey-dono!?”

Casey Held.

He was an odd monster researcher who lived and worked out of Rhoden Kingdom’s Buranbeina territory.

Glenys had a satisfied smile on her face when she heard our answer and urged us to continue.

“Hmm, I don’t see any problem with me meeting with him, do you?”

After I voiced my willingness to meet with the elder, I looked back at Ariane to see her shaking her head.

Glenys smile widened as if something about this seemed to be amusing her.

“That’s good. Ariane, I already received permission from the capital, you’ll be accompanying Arc-kun on this trip.”

Ariane looked dumbfounded as she listened to her mother’s blunt explanation.

“W-wait a minute, I have to go to Fabuna’ha too?”

“That’s right. Unfortunately, Arc-kun isn’t officially a part of the village yet. I had to use some of your grandfather’s connections and call in a favor from another great elder to set this all up, so.....”

Glenys had been walking towards her daughter as she spoke and when she reached Ariane, she whispered something into her ear that stained her cheeks crimson red and caused her to push her smiling mother away.

Even though I hadn’t expected Glenys to make her accompany me for my selfish request, but I was too preoccupied with Ariane’s strange reaction to argue against it.

“...? Something wrong Ariane-dono?”

“Kyun?”

When I asked her about it I only received a silent stare from her and Glenys only looked away from me when I turned to her.

Ponta looked worried as she stared up at Ariane’s silent expression.

“I-I’m alright! I’ll go with you.....”

Ariane signed seemingly in defeat while Glenys continued to smile and offered a suggestion.

“Since you’re going to the Southern Continent, why don’t invite that child along? Chiome-chan would love to go!”

She was very casual about it, as if she were telling us to bring along a friend to hang out with us.

However, considering the race of people that ruled the country we were visiting, offering Chiome an invitation wasn't that strange.

Chiome was the name of the cat tribe member from the People of The Plains and Mountains that lived on this continent.

The clan she belonged to was founded by someone from my world who had dedicated himself to protecting her entire race centuries ago, a mission that has been passed down through the clan ever since.

Among the Blade Heart Clan was a group of six ninjas capable of extraordinary abilities, and I got to know a couple of them when I helped them emancipate a group of slaves from the capital.

"But, would the trade ship be willing to accommodate Chiome-dono if she were to come along? And while it may not seem like it, Chiome-dono has a lot of responsibilities to handle, would she even be willing to go?"

In order to even get the negotiations about joining the trade ship on the voyage, I had to join an elven village. So I looked to Glenys to explain how someone like Chiome could come along.

No to mention how bad I feel about taking a member of the hidden village's most pivotal fighting force on what is essentially an extended ingredient hunting trip.

However, Glenys didn't seem all that worried those issues as she maintained her usual smile.

"You know that the ship is heading towards the country ruled by Chiome's people? There are going to be People of the Fields and Mountains aboard the ship. Even if Chiome-chan's clan is familiar with the ins and outs of this continent, they've yet to travel beyond the sea. I'd say that exploring the Fabuna'ha Kingdom would be beneficial for her and her clan."

If the People of the Plains and Mountains were allowed on the ship then there shouldn't be any problems.

The way Glenys had phrased it made it seem like inviting Chiome along would be for the just cause of information gathering. Since humans wielded the majority of power on this continent, she would benefit from a broadened worldview.

Reflecting on it for a bit, I turned to Ariane to see what she had to say.

“With Arc’s transfer magic, there’s no problem with asking a friend from outside the village to join us.”

Ariane was in agreement with Glenys’ suggestion.

“Hmm, then we’ll go the hidden village tomorrow and invite her.”

“Kyun! Kyun!”

With our plans for tomorrow set, Ponta cried out in protest for the delayed meal, so dinner was quickly brought out.

The next day, after sword lessons and breakfast, Ariane and I left the village.

While I say ‘left the village’ we didn’t actually leave through the gate. Instead, I invoke my long distance transfer magic Transfer Gate and the village around us just disappeared.

We now stood on a hill that overlooked a village built in Rhoden Kingdom’s Calcutta Mountain Range.

The village that had been built in this monster-infested area belonged to the People of the Plains and Mountains and was the current base of the Blade Heart Clan.

The outer wall was made of wooden logs, with an inner stone wall surrounding the village, and the sharpened points atop the walls made it appear more like a fortress instead of a village.

The drawbridge that acted as the main entrance was currently sealed tight to keep out intruders, and there were guards placed at the nearby watchtower.

Because I remembered this location from our last trip here, Transfer Gate

allowed us to instantly get here from Raratoia. Since Ariane and I were outsiders and this was a rather unexpected visit, it was better to come through the front entrance.

The People of the Plains and Mountains had physical abilities that were superior to humans', including hearing and eyesight.

It didn't hurt that I stood out in this mountainous region with my luxurious silver armor and jet-black mantle.

As we slowly got closer to the village gate, the guards immediately caught sight of us and sent word to the others inside the village.

"That was faster than expected."

Ariane looked between me and the gate when I muttered that.

In any case, the outfit I wore to maintain my secret was rather memorable.

When we reached the entrance, one of the guards waved his hand that wasn't holding his weapon and asked:

"What's your purpose?"

"We would like to offer an invitation to Chiome-dono."

After my brief reply, the gate was opened and we were prompted to enter.

The villagers had already begun their work and the laughter of children could be heard in the distance. All in all, it was a lot livelier than it had been the last time we were here.

Currently, this village was overpopulated considering the amount of people it could actually support, but the news of the upcoming migration must have already been passed along, because there were bright smiles on the faces of those we passed.

A sole cat-person with a distinct appearance soon came to greet us.

He was around a hundred and eighty centimeters tall, had straight white hair that

reached his lower back and had a long beard and eyebrows reminiscent of a hermit.

“Arc-dono, Ariane-dono, apologies for having you make a visit to this far-off village. Is there anything I can help you with?”

This calmly smiling man was called Hanzo the 22nd, and he was the current head of the Blade Heart Clan.

I bowed my head and offered him my own greeting before explaining the reason for our visit to Hanzo.

“Actually, we had a bit of business with Chiome-dono.....”

At my comment, a small cat girl silently appeared beside Hanzo and politely greeted Ariane and me.

“Arc-dono, Ariane-dono, what can I help you with?”

The girl with short raven black hair trained her blue eyes on me as she waited for our response.

She was dressed in her usual black ninja garb, with her arm-protectors, leg-guards and the dagger that was attached to her waist.

“Oh, Chiome-dono.”

Chiome slightly nodded her head at me when I called her name.

“You see, we’re we’re about to travel to the Southern Continent on an elven trade ship, and Glenys-dono suggested that we invite you to join us. Since there’s a large country run by the People of the Plains and Mountains, she figured that you would benefit from a visit over there, what do you think?”

“Oh? The Southern Continent.”

A flash of hesitation passed through Chiome’s blue eyes but she turned to Hanzo to see how he respond before I could see anything else.

Hanzo appeared as a kind old man when she smiled and nodded back at me.

“We’ve already dispatched Sasuke to Tsubone, so there no need to worry about that. But this is a good opportunity enlighten the next generation and bring back some souvenirs for the children. The more roads a child crosses, the less likely they are to trip up. Tehee.”

Chiome nodded at Hanzo then offered me a deep bow.

“I will gladly accept your invitation.”

“I’m happy to hear that, Chiome-chan.”

Ariane was smiled when she heard Chiome’s answer.

Apparently, the two of them hand struck an instant friendship at the hot spring, back when I’d been in a seven-day coma. The usually expressionless Chiome even smiled a bit and her tail began to happily sway back and forth.

Despite the slight feeling of isolation I felt, I breathed a relieved sigh as everyone had been gathered.

“The three of us will be traveling together again.”

Ponta must have taken some offense to what I said because she whacked the top of my helmet in protest.

Maybe she was mad for not being included in the count.

“Oh, sorry sorry. Can’t forget about Ponta either.”

“Kyun!”

Ponta started wagging her puffy tail when I started stroking her chin and I began to imagine what awaited us on the Southern Continent.

Chapter 3: Landfria ①

We left the village shortly after that, and the next morning we picked up Chiome from the hidden village before we returned to Raratoia and set off for Landfria.

Preparations for the journey has been finished the day before and each of us was carrying a luggage bag of what we deemed necessary over our shoulders.

Even though I said that we weren't carrying all that much, Ariane was an elven warrior used to spend days camping out in the forest during monster subjugation missions and Chiome was a ninja that traveled light since her jobs took her all over the continent.

“Are you guys ready?”

“Yeah.” “Yes.”

“Kyun!”

When Ariane and Chiome answered my question Ponta shook her tail and cried out impatiently.

“Then we're gonna use the village's shrine to transfer to Landfria.”

Ariane started walking towards the center of the village as she spoke.

Chiome and I quietly followed behind her. As I watched the two of them in front of me, I remembered an important fact that needed to be brought it up.

“Ariane-dono, is it alright for Chiome-dono to be shown the shrine and its function despite not being an elf?”

Ariane had shown me the shrine a couple days ago, and it housed the teleportation magic formation that had to be hidden from humans at all cost.

While Chiome may be a Person of the Plains and Mountains, we were still revealing a major elven secret to her.

Though it was only for short periods, I had been shown the shrine because I was an elf, plus I was capable of using unassisted transfer magic.

Ariane tilted her head and started rubbing her chin as she thought it over.

“Hmm, we already received permission from the village, though. From what I’ve heard, the Fabuna’ha Kingdom has it’s own set of shrines within their borders. Although, I haven’t really looked into it.....”

It wasn’t just me that was surprised by what she said, even the usually stoic Chiome was shocked by our conversation.

“These small shrines allow instantaneous teleportation like Arc’s magic? And these shrines are located in every elven village and in my people’s country?”

I was also as disbelieving as Chiome was, so I looked to Ariane for answers.

Those “small transfer shrines” were things that could topple this continent’s entire power structure. Their existence was something kept hidden from humans with extreme prejudice. I thought only the elves had access to them.

“It was the the first chieftain Evangeline that devised the shrine transfer network, and when Fabuna’ha’s first king founded the country she personally traveled there to construct several shrines herself.”

That nation has had connections to the Great Canada Forest since it’s founding.

“Huh? Then why do we need to take a ship the Southern Continent, shouldn’t the networks be connected in some way?”

Something about her story made me question the way we were going about this trip, but Ariane had an amazed look on her face when I asked about it.

“Although there’s been good trade relations since Fabuna’ha’s founding, it’s still a foreign country. Neither party can afford to have instantaneous travel between them.”

“Ah, I see.”

I scratched the back of my head and chuckled at her reasonable statement.

Even if the Canada and Fabuna'ha were on friendly terms, having the networks connected carried the risk of one of them invading the other one.

In any case, if the shrine transfer network was brought over by the elves, then the advantage still favored Canada.

If the Fabuna'ha Kingdom had any type of governing body, having something like that would be a nightmare for national security.

There were various circumstances involved with this, but it wasn't particularly important right now.

The fact that Chiome could use the shrine meant that we could get to the Southern Continent faster.

“So can we head to Landfria now? I'm a little excited to see how these shrines actually work.....”

My eyes moved in the direction of the shrine as I spoke.

Behind the small shrine, a small stream flowed from the east to the west through the heart of the village that was reflecting the morning sun. The chirping of birds searching for fish resounded in the area.

Surrounding the small shrine was a simple wooden enclosure, though it didn't seem to function as a barrier in particular. It reached no higher than the waist, acting simply as a boundary line for the shrine.

The Shrine had the same fused structure as the elder's mansion.

The two warriors that stood guard in front of the shrine's entrance took notice of us as we approached.

Ariane greeted them and shared a few words with them.

They had already been informed of our trip, so the two stepped aside and prompted us to enter the shrine.

She entered the shrine with a small nod, followed by me, with Chiome and Ponta bringing up the rear.

The tree the shrine was built in wasn't as wide as the mansion's, but the ceiling was higher. The atrium was supported by thick pillars surrounding the tree.

In the center of the room was a slightly elevated, circular stage where the magical tool was installed, lit up by the illumination from crystal lamps.

Inscribed into the surface of the circular platform was a complicated and mysterious magic formation, and a faint luminescence was emanated by it.

There wasn't the slightest doubt that this belonged in a fantasy setting.

While Chiome and I were fascinated by the shrine's setup, Ariane spoke with a short man who had been waiting for us before she stepped onto the platform.

"Arc, Chiome-chan, let's go. Step on the transfer formation."

Chiome and I nodded at her request before stepping onto the platform.

Immediately after we stepped on it, the symbol shined a white light so intense I had to look away as a floating sensation overtook me.

When the lights faded and I looked around, I could see that we were in a completely different location.

The small man that had stood in front of the platform had been replaced with three elves I'd never seen before.

The furnishings of the shrine we were now in weren't all that different, but the scale of everything just felt bigger.

Two of the of the people watching us had weapons hanging on their hips and maintained their vigilance. The woman standing between them was wearing traditional elven clothes and showed a gentle smile.

She gave me the impression of a secretary.

"Ariane-san from Raratoia? We've been expecting you."

"Yes, we'll be in your care."

After Ariane answered the woman's question, she told us "The elder is waiting

for you, follow me.” and started walking out of the shrine.

Ariane followed after her with Chiome and me close behind.

When we left the shrine, we were greeted by a new village.

Large trees dominated the area and I could see that all of them were lined with non-residential buildings.

The brick road that was laid out sat in the shadows of those trees and a lot of elves were walking about, with the occasional People of the Plains and Mountains moving among them.

Chiome’s eyes bulged when she saw this.

“Quite a lively village.....”

“Since this village is a gate to Fabuna’ha, it’s larger than most in Canada.”

Ariane looked back and replied to my comment.

The secretary-like woman eventually lead us to a mansion and walked us through its main gate.

The mansion had the same fused architecture as the one in Raratoia, but its shape was different.

It wasn’t as tall as the neighboring buildings for one thing.

However, the trunk that made up the basis of the mansion was thicker than any of the surrounding trees, in fact, the building had a bottle-like shape compared to the rest of the trees.

When we set foot inside the mansion, it’s furnishings were completely different from those in Raratoia’s mansion.

The hardwood floor was arranged in an elaborate parquetry, and the walls were decorated with a diverse amount of gorgeous furniture. It reminded me of a human feudal lord’s mansion, rather than a lived-in elven home.

Despite this mansion belonging to Landfria’s elder, this was the first time Ariane

has been here, so she looked around the place along with Chiome and me.

Noticing what had happened, the had secretary stopped climbing the stairs that lead to the second floor and gave us an explanation.

“Not only does this village conduct trade with the Fabuna’ha Kingdom, we also have relations with Saskatoon, who deals heavily in products from Rinburuto. Thanks to that, we have access to items other villages don’t.”

“Oh, I see.”

I continued to look around as I chimed in.

The Rinburuto Archdukedom was the neighboring country to the Rhoden Kingdom and was the only trading partner of the Great Canada Forest.

This was the first time I’ve heard of Saskatoon. but it was probably the name of the village that handled the majority of the trade with Rinburuto. A variety of human produced items could be spread among the larger villages quite easily through the use of the transfer network.

However, this was an intercontinental port village that imported good via ship, so the village called Saskatoon might be located somewhere along the coast.

The more I thought about it, the more relying entirely on transfer magic to move large shipments became unfeasible.

If the magic was already being used for traveling quickly, then the shipping of goods should have been just as easy.

However, I’ve spent the last few days walking around another village, and I hadn’t seen the same number of human items there that I’ve seen here.

There might have been a severe limitation to the network, or maybe the costs were simply too high.

While I was lost in thought, I mindlessly followed the woman until she said “Wait here.” and disappeared into a back room.

The furniture in the room we were left in was different from what we saw on the

first floor. With the simple wooden table that sat in the center of the room, it gave the impression of being a waiting room.

I sat on one of the chairs and pulled a leather canteen out of my luggage bag.

Ariane had a conflicted look on her face when she saw what I was doing.

“Wait, why are you taking that canteen out now?”

“Well, it’s not like I can meet the elder with my helmet on.”

I took a makeshift straw from my bag and placed it into the canteen.

Ariane stared at me for a moment before realization dawned on her.

“I forgot..... It’s scary how becoming accustomed to something affects your memory. You’re not gonna change back halfway again, are you?”

I stopped sipping the hot spring from the straw through the gap in my helmet and tried to ease Ariane’s worries.

“Everything should be fine Ariane-dono. I collected this water just this morning, so I shouldn’t change back during the meeting.”

Despite the bit of pride in my voice, but Ariane still gave me a worried look.

Chiome narrowed her eyes at me and sighed before walking to the corner of the room and standing there.

There wasn’t a lot of trust placed in me in this regard.

“Kyun!”

To cheer myself up I began rubbing the top of Ponta’s head. In the middle of being consoled by her barking, the secretary women peeked inside the room and called for us.

“Nolan-sama is ready for you now.”

After that brief statement, she lead us into the back room.

“Apologies for the unexpected meeting.”

As soon as we stepped into the room a single elf called out to us.

The man’s green-tinted, blonde hair was set in two braids that reached his lower back and he wore traditional elven clothes.

There was a soft smile on his face and the look in his light-green eyes reminded me of his older brother’s, Casey’s.

“I understand that you’ve met my older brother, whose whereabouts have been unknown since he left the village..... I guess you never really know what connections you’ll have in this world.”

Before we could even make a self-introduction the elder took complete control of the conversation. It took the secretary-like woman loudly clearing her throat to calm him down.

“Ah, apologies. I’m the elder of this village and the younger brother of the monster researcher Casey Held, Nolan Held Landfria. A pleasure to meet you.”

Nolan properly introduced himself as Casey’s younger brother while smiling wryly. After moving to a small sitting area in the corner of the room, we began to talk about his older brother.

Since Chiome had never met Casey she calmly sipped the cup of tea she’d been given while Ariane and I spoke of our encounter with Casey.

When Ariane brought up how we were roped into helping Casey capture a live Sandworm, Nolan struggled to maintain a smile as he muttered: “No matter how much time passes, he never changes.”.

In a world that lacked telecommunications, parting with someone could be the last time you see them, because there was no way to get in contact with them.

Even if it was only hearsay, anyone would want to learn that a family member they’d lost contact with was doing alright for themselves.

After hearing how his eccentric brother was doing, Nolan slowly stood up and expressed his gratitude.

“Once again, I’d like to apologize for requesting this abrupt meeting. However, because of this I was able to learn my brother’s whereabouts and that he is doing just fine. Though I can’t reach such a remote place, I will have some good news for mother and father.”

Nolan bowed his head and thanked us again before moving on to the reason we came here.

“The ship you’re scheduled to board should finish loading cargo today and will sail tomorrow. Until then, you’re welcome to stay in the mansion.”

I’d been prepared to board the ship today, so hearing that caused my shoulders to droop.

“I see, so we won’t be setting sail today.....”

Ariane, who’s sitting next to me, immediately replied to my remark.

“You don’t normally come to the port on the day of the departure. How else would you know if there was a change in the schedule.....”

“I guess you have a point.....”

I nodding at her comment.

If I thought about it, public transportation was a hard thing to keep track of in my former world. Even in a highly advanced society, sailing was heavily dictated by the weather and other unforeseen circumstances.

It was common sense that ships in this world would be allowed a bit of leeway in their schedule.

Since I’ve been depending on transfer magic till now, it seems that I’d lost touch with common sense for a bit.

After leaving Nolan, the female secretary led us to our individual rooms, where I placed my baggage next to the bed and stared out of the window.

It was still early in the day, so people were still going about their business beyond the mansion’s gate.

It would be a waste to just sit around till tomorrow, so I put down my sword and grabbed my money pouch.

When I left my room, I saw Chiome and Ariane stepping out of their own guest rooms and locking eyes with me.

“You heading somewhere, Arc?”

Ariane guessed my attention with a single look.

“Yes, the day is still young after all. Since the ship won’t be setting sail ‘til tomorrow, I figured I should find something fun to do near the harbor.”

“Then let’s go together. I’d worry if you’re left alone.....”

When I answered her question, Ariane stared at me through half-closed eyes and suggested that I join them.

As I gauged her reaction, it felt strange to know that I was viewed as a troublemaker if left to my own devices.

..... It’s strange.

All joking aside, I’d probably get lost in the unfamiliar place like Landfria by myself so having Ariane along would be convenient.

I nodded at the suggestion and we left a message with someone working in the mansion before going to the harbor.

Chapter 4: Landfria ②

While she never met the elder, Ariane had been to Landria before, so she acted as a guide for Chiome and me.

It was like two country bumpkins coming to the big city for the first time, but that couldn't be helped given the layout of the village.

Some of the apartment buildings that were built next to the large trees easily reached seven or eight stories high.

From a distance, the buildings simply appeared to be tall trees, but upon closer inspection they could easily pass for high-rise apartments from my former world.

There were corridors connecting the buildings and several elves could be seen walking between them, even from ground level.

“There are so many people here, just how many live in this village?”

Chiome asked any unexpected question as she glanced our surroundings.

Ariane looked back and replied with her best guess.

“I don't know the exact number, but it should be around forty thousand? It might be higher given the influx of temporary residents.”

Chiome eye's bulged at Ariane's reply.

“I believed Raratoia to be a large village, considering that it was built in the depths of a vast forest, but the difference in scale is unbelievable..... I never believed such a city could be built.”

Admiration could be heard in her voice.

The hidden village Chiome called her home was built in the middle of the Calcutta Mountain Range and a thousand people already exceeded its limits, yet this village had a population about forty times larger than that.

The only town I'd been to that matched this village's scale would be Rhoden's capital.

Eventually, we left the apartment area and arrived at a lively section of the city populated with the mushroom-like houses I'd seen in Raratoia.

A few of these houses turned out to be shops with various types of good arranged in front of them, with some people that were calling out to potential customers.

The entire area was like a lively shopping district, many colorful goods I didn't come across in human cities caught my attention and the sea breeze covered the district in a faint oceanic fragrance.

"Hmm, this smell..... the variety of spices is abundant."

"Kyun!"

Mixed in-between that fragrance was a blend of distinct spices that caused Ponta and me to simultaneously look around for its source, while Ariane provided supplemental information

"The spices that permeate the marketplace all originate from the Fabuna'ha Kingdom

When I heard her say that, I involuntarily swallowed my saliva as I remembered the hamburger steak I had back in Raratoia.

Ponta restlessly moved about on my helmet as she tried to find the source of the spices that called out to her.

My appearance and Ponta's behavior must have made us stand out more the usual because an elf shopkeeper called out to me.

"Hey, my friend in the fancy armor, how would you like to buy some fresh tomatoes today?"

The man had the green tinged, blonde hair and the average features of normal elves that I've become used to, but he spoke like a slightly vulgar barker and he was desperately trying to get me to pay attention to what he was holding.

When I looked in his hand I saw that he was holding what was unmistakably a ripe tomato.

“Oh, fresh tomatoes are sold at the harbor.”

I stop walking and voiced the thought that crossed my mind at the moment.

Because I only saw dried tomatoes back in the Raratoia, I’d thought that the tomatoes were already processed by the time they reached the Great Canada Forest.

The tomato in the merchant’s hand was round like the ones from my former world, but it was a little smaller than those.

“If we can buy these in Landfria, is there any reason to go to Fabuna’ha ?”

Ariane stepped forward and took a look at the tomatoes that the merchant had to offer and voiced her opinion. However, I shook my head and flatly refused to do that.

“This and that are two separate matters. We’re already at the edge of a new world, it’s too late to turn back now. Besides, we can’t deny Chiome-dono the opportunity to see a country built by her people.”

When I said that Chiome stepped forward and feverishly shook her head in agreement.

Ariane shrugged her shoulders at that while, I turned to the merchant and placed an order.

“Shopkeeper, please sell me one tomato for tasting.”

“Huh? One tomato..... for tasting?”

The merchant started acting weird when he heard my request and even repeated it himself for clarity’s sake.

Not knowing what was wrong with him, I turned to Ariane to see if she knew what the deal was, and she began to ask the merchant something.

“Ah, have these tomatoes not been processed?”

“That’s right, I can wholesale tomatoes for cheap by not processing them.”

I was still out of the loop about everything, but the shopkeeper replied to Ariane’s question and she nodded as if she understood it.

“Tomatoes are poisonous if they’re not processed correctly, so these can’t be eaten right now. Since we only have gold coins at the moment, this would still be rather expensive even if we paid with a quarter piece, so you should adjust the amount.”

Something that Ariane said just made the marketplace and everything else fade away.

“So Ariane-dono, how many sho……. Wait, did you just say tomatoes were poisonous?!”

I couldn’t prevent the shock I’d just received for slipping into my voice.

It was the shopkeeper that stepped up to answer me.

“What? Do you not do much cooking? That’s quite the surprise! Tomatoes are inedible in their natural state, you have to remove the poisonous bits first. Though, I suppose the worst that could happen with only one would be an extreme case of diarrhea! Hehehe.”

The shopkeeper rolled the tomato in his hand as he chuckled.

As he did that Ariane took over the explanation.

“Originally, tomatoes were known throughout Fabuna’ha as ‘the diarrhea fruit’ for those suffering from constipation. Apparently, Fabuna’ha’s first king named them tomatoes and greatly suffered because he enjoyed eating them so much. When the tomatoes were first imported to the forest, founder Evangeline created a method that removed the poisonous elements. From what I heard, the king was so grateful that the friendship between Fabuna’ha and Canada deepened.”

My eyes returned to the tomato in the shopkeeper’s hand when she started getting into the relationships between the two countries.

“..... The diarrhea fruit, quite an unflattering title.”

I shook my head while voicing my thoughts about the disgraceful name.

Could I eat a raw tomato with my current physiology without contracting diarrhea?

I never heard of a skeleton with diarrhea, but I wasn't willing to risk it.

However, the fact that Fabuna'ha first king would name the so-called diarrhea-inducing drug “tomatoes”, suggested that he had been a person with circumstances similar to mine.

There was a high probability that Evangeline was from the same world as I was and she had still been around six hundred years ago. Maybe these two struck up a friendship while figuring out how to eat tomatoes.

The Fabuna'ha Kingdom was founded five hundred years ago. Even now that friendship still exists in the form of trade between the two nations, maybe I can learn more about their relationship through this trip.

“So how are the poisonous elements removed from tomatoes?”

I turned away from the tomatoes and asked Ariane that question.

If they were unsuitable to eat in their current state, then I could only stare at the mountain of tomatoes in front of me.

“You need to soak them in a tub of water along with Detoxification Crystals for two hours, then you can cook or preserve them..... I think?”

Ariane was a little unsure about it so she looked to the shopkeeper to get his input on the matter.

He nodded with a large smile on his face before speaking up.

“I can't offer you anything else right now..... But, if you can get your hands on some Detoxification Crystals you could eat some raw tomatoes.”

I reluctantly said goodbye to the shopkeeper and checked out the other shops in

the area.

There was an abundant amount of spices from the Southern Continent on display and the foods I wanted to eat with them filled my mind as we passed them by.

While my mind was filled with thoughts of different types of food, a certain shop caught my attention.

It was a shop that specialized in papyrus, parchment, paper, and similar things considering that scrolls and paper bundles of various sizes lined the store front. What had caught my attention, though, was a painting that had been hung up nearby.

“Shopkeeper, what’s that landscape drawn there?”

The shopkeeper seemed worried when he looked up to find me in my full-body armor, but I paid no mind to him since the painting had the majority of my attention.

The item I’d pointed out was a painting of some kind of city and its surrounding landscape. It wasn’t the only painting of its kind, though, as there were several similar ones scattered throughout the shop.

“Oh, that thing? It’s the image of Fabuna’ha Kingdom’s harbor city, Plymouth.”

Having recognized me as a potential customer, the shopkeeper did his best to deepen my interest in the item.

When the shopkeeper saw Ariane and Chiome take interest in the painting as well, he started showing off the other paintings in the store.

The transportation methods in this world weren’t all that advanced, so paintings offered a sense of wonder and entertainment to viewers.

“See anything that peaks your interest?”

I nodded at the shopkeeper’s question and pointed out the item that I wanted to purchase.



“Why did you buy that stuff? I was sure you’d buy one of the paintings.”

A few minutes after leaving the shop, Ariane asked me that question with a confused expression.

Just as she said, I didn’t actually buy one of the paintings. Instead, I’d bought a bundle of A4 sized papers held together by strings and a couple of writing implements.

“Ariane-dono, Transfer Gate allows me to move to any location I want so long as I can remember the scenery, and therein lays its only limitation. However, it’ll be considerably easier to remember locations if I draw the destination on pieces of paper.”

I explained the thoughts that had occurred to me when I first saw the paintings.

Ariane immediately agreed with my idea after she heard it.

“It’s a good way to strengthen your memories of certain locations. Otherwise, you could confuse your intended location with other places and transfer there by mistake.”

I listen to Ariane rather rude comment as we left Landria’s shopping district and entered the harbor.

The vast sea that spread before my eyes was accompanied by a small neighborhood built atop of the cliff we found ourselves on. There was a stairway built into the cliffside that led to the actual harbor where various ships were docked.

I could see many people moving at the bottom of the cliff, but there weren’t many people taking the stairs.

After descending the high stairway, we found ourselves on the quay, which was connected to the warehouses built into the partially hollowed out cliff.

Apparently, this district was built in two layers.

The warehouses and other buildings built into the cave sat on solid ground and overall it was a rather active place.

“It’s more like a hidden base than a harbor.....”

I became a little excited as we approached the harbor, however, there was a chest high gate at the end of the stairs that prevented us from entering the harbor.

“Only harbor personnel are allowed beyond this point. But we’ll be able to enter when it’s time to board the Liebbelta tomorrow.”

While feeling a bit disappointed by that, I craned my neck to see the ship Ariane had pointed out.

That mysterious ship I saw in the underground lake was the only other similar looking thing I’d seen in this world, but the near hundred meters long Liebbelta easily exceeded that one in size.



There weren't a lot of decorations on it like human ships, but that lack of unnecessary features, along with the three masts with folded sails, gave the ship a dignified beauty.

The hull of the ship wasn't wooden, instead, it had a slightly reflective, whitish tint to it that reflected the gentle waves of the sea.

"Ariane-dono, what's that ship made out of?"

I unintentionally asked Ariane about the ship's construction and she thought hard about it before she answered.

"Hmm, I don't really know all that much about ships..... But, I've heard dragon scales were implemented to increase the ship's durability."

Ariane looked towards the Liebbelta as she spoke.

A faint sense of joy entered my head when I heard about the fantasy-setting appropriate concept of including dragon scales in ships.

While I didn't know the defensive capabilities of dragon scales, the ship seemed to be ironclad.

Although it was too far away to see clearly from here, several cannons lined the deck of the ship. I'd call it a battleship rather than a trade ship.

But, ironclad ships were made using steel and iron as their base. Those types of ships had been developed to defend against the cannon fire from other ships, so why had this ship been ironclad?

Based on what Ariane said about the cannons back at the underground lake humans haven't even begun to produced cannons.....

Ariane tapped me on the shoulder before I became too lost in my thoughts.

"Let's head back, we can get a closer look tomorrow instead of peeking from here."

I turned away for the anchored Liebbelta and nodded at what she said.

Let's leave these difficult things for later and focus on the joy that tomorrow's vogue would give me.

I was so excited, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to sleep tonight.

Chapter 5: Voyage ①

Early morning the following day.

The sky was still a dark indigo blue and a thin layer of fog blown in from the sea still clung to Landfria.

Despite the fog that covered everything, the sailors of the Liebbelta were hard at work preparing the ship to set sail.

Chiome and I were both excited while the ship was being prepared, but Ariane and Ponta merely yawned and rubbed their tired eyes.

“I never imagined that a device could ridden up and down inside a building. It certainly makes moving supplies between the surface and the underground harbor easy.”

Chiome’s admiration leaked out as she looked back at the people working in the building behind us.

She had brought up rising and descending platforms that were connected to the building, they were basically elevators, or lifts, if you prefer.

However, they didn’t function via mechanics, but rather some form of magic to move the platforms, making it feel more Sci-fi than anything else.

“There are a lot of convenient things in elven villages.”

“.....Hmm? I guess so.....”

Ariane looked at Chiome and gave a non-committal reply to the statement she had made.

The sea breeze that blew her long, white hair about also made her hug her own shoulders and shiver.

Despite her tired appearance, a group of dark elf workers sent jeers at Ariane as she passed by them.

There were a lot more dark elves like Ariane in this harbor in preparation for a voyage than there were in the entirety of Raratoia. Maybe it had something to do with them having the high physical strength working here required that regular elves lacked.

There were also many beastmen with excellent physiques from the Southern Continent.

One man, who seemed to be in charge of the whole operation, pushed his way through the crowd and greeted us with a large smile.

The man was a dark elf, but his lilac skin had a slightly gray tinge to it as if he was sporting a slight tan, and he just seemed to give a stronger impression of being a “Dark Elf” than others.

It was closer to the blown-skinned elf that I could turn into.

“Are you the ones the elder talked about? I am the captain of the Liebbelta. Hurry, we’ll be setting sail soon! Once you’re on board, please don’t get in the way of the sailors as they work!”

The man introduced himself as the captain of the huge trade ship before turning on his heel and walking away with large strides.

However, he seemed to have remembered something and turned around to give us one last instruction.

“I don’t mean to come off as rude, but please stay away from the rear hold! If things are quiet, we should arrive in Plymouth by tomorrow morning! See you later!”

Having finished his business with us, the captain went about giving the sailors of the trade battleship last-minute instructions.

Ariane began to board the ship after that, and Chiome hustled her baggage over her shoulders and followed her.

However, something the captain had said had me frozen in place.

“Hey, do you what to be left behind, Arc?”

Ariane looked back and asked me what was wrong with me.

However, I ignored her question and asked her about what was on my mind.

“Ariane-dono, was the captain telling the truth!?”

My rather vague question confused Ariane, so I tried to be a bit more specific with the follow-up question.

“Did the captain mean it when he said we’d arrive by tomorrow!?”

I didn’t expect the captain to say that..... it was unbelievable that an entire voyage could be completed in a single day. Ariane turned to Chiome to ask her about it.

“Is it really that impressive to arrive so early? Not having to spend days on end at sea is a good thing, isn’t it, Chiome-chan?”

Chiome responded to Ariane’s question with a nod.

“I’m actually grateful for not having to spend multiple days out at sea. But isn’t the closeness to the Southern Continent rather surprising?”

Ariane looked up at the anchored Liebbelta after hearing the surprise in Chiome’s voice.

“The Liebbelta is capable of reaching the Southern Continent in a single day. It would take a human ship four days to make the trip, you know?”

There was a tinge of pride in Ariane’s voice that made me look up at the trade battleship.

If she was telling the truth, this ship was four times faster than any current human ship.

The red comet is so far away.....

While we were in the midst of our conversation a loud bell rang on board the Liebbelta.

Ariane hosted her baggage again and started to jog towards the ship when she

heard that.

“Arc, that the departure bell! We’ll be left behind if we don’t get moving! Hurry!”

“! Gotcha!” “Kyun!”

I quickly began running towards the ship after replying to Ariane’s comment.

The ramp leading to the ship was removed from beneath my feet right after I manage to get on board, and sailors were already busy at work.

The trade battleship, Liebbelta, slowly began setting sail under the sound of the bell which was still being struck.

Not wanting to interfere with any of the sailors, I took over the side of the railing.

When I looked towards the harbor, I saw a crowd of people standing around, waving goodbye to some of the sailors above deck.

“Ariane-dono..... shouldn’t they be unfurling the sails?”

She was shocked for a moment by my unexpected question, but she quickly understood what I was asking and why.

“The Liebbelta is a magic ship. Since the wind doesn’t flow through the underground harbor, how is it supposed to move forward if not by using magic?”

Learning that the ship could move without having to rely on the wind, Chiome looked up to the still furled sail but had only casually brought it up before looking over the side of the ship.

In layman’s terms, this ship was at least partially powered by a propulsion engine.

Given the captain’s warning, the engine was probably located in the rear hold.

I wonder if the mechanism behind the ship’s propulsion was also kept hidden from humans.

“Ariane-dono are ships like this kept secret?”

Ariane indifferently leaned on one of the ship’s carved out railings as she answered my question about the Liebbelta.

“I don’t know. I’m not an engineer and have no idea how this ship was built.”

After answering my questions, Ariane looked up at the sky and her large chest swayed with the rhythm of the waves.

I scratched my chin while taking note of her ample bosom.

What she said was reasonable, as I doubted that non-engineers could explain how a machine functioned all that well.

Even in my old world, everyone knew that cars required an engine to run, but few people actually knew anything beyond that.

In any case, this propulsion engine-equipped ship was four times faster than human ships.

Though I was a little disappointed that this voyage to the new world would end within a day, reaching the Southern Continent quickly was a good thing in the end.

I nodded at my own conclusion.

When the bell rang again someone shouted “Open the sails!!”, and the sails that had been furled on the three masts until now began to open.

The magic ship Liebbelta left the harbor all too soon and passed several islets and reefs off the coast.

The ship began to gradually increase in speed, leaving only collapsing waves behind as it left the area.

However, the next moment an alarm bell rung and the deck became very busy.

Ariane jerked up and looked towards the back of the ship.

“Pirates.....”

Her white hair was blowing in the sea breeze as Ariane squinted her golden eyes.

At the place she was looking at..... I could see the shadows of two ships appearing from behind a nearby islet.

“Pirates actually appeared.....”

We weren’t even that far away from Landria’s harbor. The sanity of any pirate that would ambush a ship here had to be called into question.

The pirate ships weren’t even half the length of the Liebbelta.

The Liebbelta was ironclad by using dragon scales, while the other ships were common wooden ships.

Moreover, the ships were obviously the slower vessels.

Though their ambush was somewhat successful, the distance between us was gradually increasing.

“Occasionally, human countries send ships disguised as pirates to steal elven technology..... Things should be alright if they remain as they are.”

Ariane seemed to have been aware of the pirates and dismissively shrugged her shoulders as the distance continued to grow.

I suppose that any competent ruler would be after this shipbuilding technology. The pirate ships couldn’t compare to their elven counterparts. It could be inferred that these pirate ships were greatly surpassed by any of the other ships anchored in Landria.

The moment I thought that two shock waves rocked the ship.

When I turned back I saw that two gun ports had opened up and fired upon the pirate ships.

As the shockwave echoed through the Liebbelta, an explosion erupted near the pirate ships.

A massive column of water rose to the sky behind one of the ships but the shot

had succeeded in breaking the mast and confused shouts could be heard from there.

In a marine battle, the heavy metal shell that cannons fired packed quite the punch and were barely affected by the sway of a ship. However, it was also possible to damage enemy ships with explosive rounds if they were within the blast range.

The shell that had just been fired was probably similar to the Explosive Magic Crystals that had been used during the revolt in Hoban.

The other ship lowered its speed an attempt to rescue those on the ship that had lost the ability to sail.

As the two pirate ships gave up their pursuit the Liebbelta began to widen the distance between them.

“A single mana cannon-equipped ship can easily best ten human pirate ships.....”

Ariane replied to my comment as I observed the situation.

“They’re primarily used to combat monsters, not to sink pirate ships.”

“Oh, I see.”

Hearing her comment, the realization that monsters inhabited the sea dawned on me.

The blue sea spread out before us as the morning sun rose and the glittering waves forced me to narrow my eyes.

I placed my head in front of my eyes and smiled at the sky and sea in front of me.

In this vast sea laid a number of monsters that could become a threat to the Liebbelta and its crew.

If there were things like ground dragons and Dragon Kings on the land, who was to say that there wouldn’t be any monsters in the sea?

And what's the most famous ocean monster in the world?

Chapter 6: Voyage ②

“What kind of monsters live in the sea that require this much firepower?”

I asked Ariane that question while she was leaning back and enjoying the ocean breeze.

Given the power of the cannons they must have been rather large.

Chiome was the one that looked away from the sea and answered me.

“The southern sea is famous for its plethora of dangerous monsters that inhabit it, like kraken. I’ve never seen the real thing, but they’re said to be huge creatures larger than most ships. Moreover, they have countless tentacles extending from their bodies..... just what type of creatures are they?”

Chiome directed her blue eyes toward the sea and set her elbow against the ship’s railing as she contemplated the form of the strange monster.

Chiome usually hid her emotions quite well, but she couldn’t prevent her excitement from showing through her swaying tail.

While I watched Chiome, I imagined the kraken that she had spoken of while tilting my head.

“The size of a ship and possessing numerous tentacles.....”

Hearing the name kraken brought up the image of a giant squid or octopus.

However, I’ve been repeatedly shown that the actual characteristic of certain monsters and what I thought they should look like differed greatly.

..... For all I knew she was talking about a giant cuttlefish with long, reaching tentacles connected to its face.

I had to clear my mind with furious head shaking when I started to imagine a creature like that attacking the Liebbelta.

If it was comparable to this ship's size, it'd be a hundred meters long at the very least.

“Human ships aren't well equipped to deal with them, so they'd probably fall victim to kraken attacks.”

Even if you had cannons, it was questionable if you could defeat a kraken. Humans have yet to begin developing cannon technology and without long-range weaponry, a ship would be as good as sunk if they stumbled upon a kraken.

Chiome slowly turned back to me when she heard my prediction.

“The name kraken has been famous since before the empire split into its current Eastern and Western halves. The formerly united empire once tried to send a massive fleet to subjugate the Southern Continent, but it was completely annihilated by a kraken.”

I remembered that the founder of the Blade Heart Clan had originally worked within the united empire before he fled to start his clan.

It was something Chiome had told me before we raided the Etsuato company on Rhoden's capital.

It was said that the machinations of the original Hanzo caused the conflict between the various factions surrounding the emperor's succession to intensify, which lead to its schism into East and West.

“Hmm... Chiome-dono, you said that the original Hanzo had been an imperial spy before forming your clan..... is it possible that the failed expedition was connected to the fall of the empire as well?”

Chiome climbed through her memories before she nodded at me.

“Yes, there were actually two large-scale expeditions that had been sent out, but after the second fleet had been destroyed, the emperor started to lose his authority.”

I didn't know much about the size of the fleet, but even one ship wasn't cheap.

A loss of authority was to be expected after failing twice to expand the empire's control into the Southern Continent.

So the thing that made the schism of the empire possible was the kraken.....

Nevertheless.....

“To have both fleets destroyed by a kraken..... that emperor must have been very unlucky.”

I couldn't help but feel a little bit of sympathy for that emperor, but Ariane spoke up and argued against it.

“Krakens come up to the surface when they're hunting their prey, which congregates there. It's only a matter of time before a large fleet crosses paths with one.”

“..... I see, so that why.”

Ariane shrugged as she spoke but Chiome seemed to be genuinely interested in new information.

I simply nodded along and agreed with her.

If the outline of a ship ran along the sea surface, it would come across as a large pod of fish to a hungry predatory kraken. Considering the size of this ship, it wouldn't be surprising if it was attacked more frequently than human ships.

When I asked Ariane about it, she turned her head and looked out to the sea.

“I don't know a lot about this, but maybe they can outrun it? Human ships are simply unprepared to deal with a surfacing kraken after all.....”

In the middle of her explanation, Ponta suddenly stood up on my head and started to anxiously cry about something.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

A loud alarm bell started ringing shortly after that.

An elven sailor that stood in the crow's nest began shouting and making pointing

gestures in a certain direction. Then the sound of a man's voice came out of one of the speaking tubes that lined the ship.

Kraken spotted on the starboard bow!! I repeat, kraken spotted on the starboard bow!!

Instructions were given after the warning while the tension rose aboard the ship, yet the sailors, rather than acting in a frenzied manner, moved as if this was a routine occurrence.

I closely watched the sea on the starboard bow and remained on the lookout for the kraken that Chiome and I just had been discussing.

However, even when I strained my eyes the only thing that I saw was the vast open sea and the clear blue sky.

"I don't see any krakens out there..... how about you Chiome-dono?"

Even as I leaned over the railing a little I still couldn't see anything, so I asked Chiome about it since she was looking out as well.

"No, I can't see anything either."

But she only shook her head and gave me a negative reply.

The ship suddenly took an abrupt left turn, causing the deck to slant heavily and the sail to noisily flail about.

I looked back on the deck, the elven sailors were staring off the starboard bow, while the beastmen sailors were looking all over the place for the kraken.

When turned to Ariane there was a full smile on her and she nodded before returning her eyes to the sea.

"Do you see, Arc? Krakens occasionally swim close to the surface, but since their bodies can blend in with their surroundings it's difficult to find them. Without the ability to detect miasma, it's nigh impossible to see a kraken until it's too late."

I glanced out at the sea as Ariane spoke.

Though I had similar abilities as the elves of this world, mine were comparatively weaker than those of the local dark elves.

Although my sight was impressive, I could only see the blue sea in the distance.

“If they blend into their surroundings you wouldn’t notice them until they attack.....”

I was amazed at the abilities of krakens and voiced my impression.

“The krakens’ abilities.....”

Chiome also openly reveal her surprise.

Blending into their surroundings, basically optical camouflage.

Squids and octopi could change their body coloration, but it must have seemed alien to the people of this world.

Well, monsters capable of using optical camouflage still seem to be detectable by their mana-signature, so it should be all right.

“Though the reason they surface isn’t known, elves are the only ones that can detect krakens beforehand. They’re rather large too, so it will seem as if a mountain rises from the sea.....”

Ariane was speaking in her usual prideful manner whenever she talked about what elves could do and gesturing about the sizes of different krakens.

Though I was a little disappointed about not seeing the creature myself, I could do nothing but sigh and rest my chin on the railing since a safe voyage outweighed my curiosity.

The beastmen sailors also seemed somewhat disappointed by this as they returned to their stations.

“..... the kraken won’t follow us, will it?”

I brought up a possible problem as I absentmindedly looked out to the sea.

However, Ariane sat up straight and patted the ship’s railing.

“Fully grown, adult kraken can’t keep up with this ship. Maybe younger small krakens could put up a decent chase, but it is rare for one of them t.....”

Before Ariane could finish speaking Ponta began to tremble on top of my helmet. The next moment a major tremor ran through the ship and knocked Ponta off my head.

“What happened!?”

I caught Ponta and put her back on my head as I scanned the area.

Then someone began shouting.

“Juvenile kraken on the stern!!”

Everyone on the deck froze when they heard that.

Then..... something like a gleeful roar shook the ship.

“Kyaaaa!! Get to the stern, hurry!!!”

“Shiyaaa!! Last one there loses his share!!!”

“I’ve been waiting for a kraken to show up!!!”

The ones showing such unexpected reactions to the news were beastmen like Chiome. They grabbed a weapon and ran for the back of the ship at full speed.

The image of a department store opening on a bargain sale crossed my mind.

On the other hand..... the elven sailors seemed to be worried about the turn of events and couldn’t seem to understand the behavior of their crew mates.

Being attacked by sea monsters was something that should’ve been feared, yet there was no sense of tragedy here.

“It feels like I just walked into a festival!! You don’t mind if I join in do you?”

I drew the Holy Thunder Sword and ran towards the stern.

When I arrived, I was greeted with the hellish sight of a group of armed

beastmen combating a ten-meter tall, colossal squid.



Some of them had been knocked aside by the kraken, but their naturally resilient bodies allowed them to wipe off the blood and go after the kraken again.

Meanwhile, a member of the wolf tribe had managed to cut off one of the kraken's arms, making it roar to the heavens.

When I saw one of its tentacles approaching the wolf-eared man I quickly stepped in.

The wolf beastman was utterly surprised when I came up behind him and cut off the tentacle that had been coming after him.

The robust tentacle fell onto the ship's deck.

"Don't be so careless."

"Thanks for the help brother."

I shook off the blood and seawater as the wolf beastman called out to me. When I looked ahead I saw the other beastman cheering as they surrounded the dying kraken.

"That was surprisingly unfulfilling....."

I shelved my sword as I watch the scene play out and was about to leave when the wolf-eared man I saved called out to me.

"This piece is yours, brother! What do you want to do with it?"

He grabbed my shoulder and as he said that.

Everyone seemed pleased with what had happened, so was there anything else?

"Is kraken edible?"

Despite them being monsters krakens, were still squids. That was the only use that came to mind.

Apparently, I was right on the mark.

"Ouyo"! Do you want to sprinkle some salt on it now? We could also dry it! If

you cook it over the fire, it will go well with liquor!”

“Ohh” “Kyukyun ☆”

As the wolf beastman told me the how the kraken could be prepared, Ariane and Chiome came up behind us.

The two of them had different reactions when they were asked about taking their own share.

Ariane aggressively shook her head and stepped back.

Chiome, on the other hand, stepped forwards with her tail standing up straight.

However, Ponta voiced a protest from atop my head.

“Don’t worry, I make sure you get your fair share, Ponta.”

“Kyun!”

After that exchange, Chiome and I hung around to see how the dying took place.

The people around us scrambled to start dismantling in the large creature.

Within a matter of minutes, the ten-meter long kraken was brought onto the Liebbelta, sliced into large pieces, and hung from a rack.

The squid should be dried out by tonight.

When the top layer was dried out it would be cut off and the exposed layer would be washed with seawater..... The method was incredibly simple, but watching made me want to swallow my saliva.

Soy sauce and sake would go along with some grilled squid, but I hadn’t seen either of these things in the village.

I couldn’t ask for that much...

The tails of both Ponta and Chiome were synchronized with one another as they watched the kraken being sliced up, in the meantime I opened my luggage sack.

Inside, along with a few other things, were a water canteen that contained the spring water I'd collected this morning, a makeshift straw to sip on it and the package I bought yesterday in Landfria, which contained the stack of papers and art supplies I was currently retrieving.

I might as well do something while the kraken was dried.

Thinking such, I sat down in a cross-legged position and took a page out of the paper bundle.

"Hmm, the helmet obstructs my vision after all....."

I took my helmet off after mumbling to myself, picked up my writing implements, which were basically charcoal sticks, and began drawing lines on the paper.

After making a rough sketch of the perimeter, I began adding details.

When I looked back and forth between the deck and the paper I reflected on how long it has been since I drew anything. While I was absorbed in my work, Ariane came up beside me and commented on my drawing.

"Arc, you can draw? This is pretty good."

"Really? Hmm, it stills seems a little amateurish."

What she said reminded me of something that happened in the past.

A long ago, one of my creations had been displayed in multiple exhibits.

When was that..... I remember that a certain girl in my art class praised me for one of my drawings, even though I thought her drawing was more atmospheric than mine had been.

However, my work had been selected for the exhibit over hers and I felt a bit sorry for that girl when I saw her again.

I wonder what that girl was doing right now?

Ariane suddenly got in my face while my mind had been occupied with thoughts

of the past.

“Are you all right, Arc?”

Her golden dark elf eyes were focused entirely on me.

Whenever I regained my body, homesickness would creep into my thoughts if I let it.

I shook my head and took a deep breath of sea breeze.

Shifting my gaze to Ariane’s chest and changed the topic.

“Yes..... Ariane-dono I think the skin on your chest is starting to get a tan.....”

The moment I said that Ariane’s cheeks turned a bright shade of vermillion and she slapped me in the face.

“Looks like I worried for nothing.”

Ariane folded her arms an attempt to hide her chest and looked away.

Tears appeared in the corner of her eyes as she brought her hand to her face.

I had to sigh after that because I doubted that would have happened had I been enjoying sake and grilled squid.

Nevertheless, the filleted kraken meat was still being hung out to dry and imagining the taste of it tonight was enough to keep me in a good mood for the rest of the day.

At least..... that’s what I told myself.

Chapter 7: Harbor Town Plymouth ①

I spent last night sleeping in my narrow cabin while wearing my armor and only woke up the next morning when a fur ball began to restlessly move about on my face.

The rocking of the ship must have moved Ponta up to my face from the spot on my chest where she'd been sleeping.

While still half asleep I picked Ponta up by the scruff of her neck to stop her from licking me.

Though it was a rather abrupt awakening, I sat up and took a look around as I started to stretch out my stiff limbs.

“Kyun!”

“Did something wake you up, Ponta?”

Ponta climbed up my shoulder when I called out to her.

The light that leaked in from the round ship window dimly illuminated the small cabin.

There wasn't anyone's shadow inside this cabin but mine and Ponta's..... not that there was much room left in the cabin after my armored-self settled inside the room.

After corrected the position of my helmet, I lowered my head as I walked through the cabin door.

Since the ship was occasionally racked by large waves, I used a line of wall handles to make my way above deck. The sails were fluttering and dawn was just beginning to brighten the sky.

When I shifted my eyes to the sea just right of the ship I saw a still black landmass off in the distance.

It was still too dark to make out anything from here, but the landmass rose up into a steep cliff without any safe place for a ship to dock.

“Oh, have we reached the Southern Continent already.....”

As I gazed upon the darkened landmass, one of the People of the Plains and Mountains heard my comment and called out to me in a light tone.

“Rather strange to wear armor up on deck. So, is this your first visit to the Fabuna’ha Kingdom?”

The man was from the same tribe as Chiome and after yawning and resting his elbow on the ship’s railing he looked up at me.

I nodded at his question and looked down at the man before answering.

“I’m a little interested in the country built by the People of the Plains and Mountains..... In fact, the purpose of this trip is to research tomatoes and other spices.”

When I said that the cat-eared man looked up at me in confusion.

“The People..... of the Plains and Mountains? You mean the Fabuna’ha Kingdom found by the beastmen?”

It was my turn to give him a confused look.

“...? Isn’t that a derogatory term to call your people, or is it different on the Southern Continent?”

From what Chiome told me, the term “beastmen” was an insult that humans gave to people with animal ears and tails, so they referred to themselves as the “the People of the Plains and Mountains”.

When I explained it to the cat-eared man’s face lit up as if something crossed his mind.

“Oh, I guess that’s what my people call themselves in the north. Long ago, Fabuna’ha’s first king united the separate tribes into a single community of beastmen and built the country from there.”

There was a hint of pride in the man's voice as he explained his feeling behind the name.

If that were the case..... it meant that common sense of this continent was different from its Northern counterpart.

"There aren't a lot humans can do on the Southern Continent."

"Oh, I see. Are there no humans on the Southern Continent at all?"

The man had a slightly wryly smile on his face as he answered my question.

"There's a human settlement across the two major plains west of Fabuna'ha. Since they're close enough to launch an attack a defensive line was set up along Fabuna'ha's border"

There wasn't much hostility on the man's face as he talked about humans.

In fact, the way he spoke of them made me think there might be individual differences in opinions about humans.

When I questioned him a bit more about them, he chuckled and shook his head.

"The humans built a wall around their lands and don't venture out of them much. Besides, there's no way that Fabuna'ha's beastmen soldiers would fall behind human soldiers!"

Contrary to the situation on the Northern Continent, the beastmen seem to be the conquerors of the Southern Continent.

It might have been best for the people of the hidden villages to relocate to the Southern Continent, but it wasn't my place to determine their actions.

Also, the objective of Chiome's "Blade Heart Clan" was to free their enslaved people from humans and simply relocating the villagers here would only be a half-measure.

Centuries of animosity can't be settled overnight.

For now, Chiome would have to look at the country her people built and tell

those of her village what she saw.

Chiome suddenly called out to me just as that thought crossed my mind.

“Arc-dono. You’re already here? Actually, there’s something I wanted to discuss with you.....”

When I looked back, I saw Chiome modestly looking up at me, dressed in her usual black attire. Her face was as emotionless as always, but the tail attached to her lower back was restlessly moving about.

“Oh, good morning Chiome-dono. What do you want from me?”

The man I’d been talking to parted ways with us as Chiome came closer.

When I asked what business she had with me, Chiome nodded to make up her mind before looking up at me again.

“The portion of dried kraken Arc-dono received, could I purchase some of it off from you?”

“Kyun? Kyun, Kyun!”

I looked down at Chiome when she spoke her unexpected request.

When I looked into her earnest blue eyes her cheeks became a slight shade of vermillion and her mouth twitched a bit, a rare expression suitable for a girl of her age.

Before I could agree to Chiome’s request Ponta slid down from my head and looked up at me while protesting.

Their behavior reminded me of what had happened when the dried kraken had been cooked up for dinner.

I offered some to Ariane but she feverishly shook her head no and stepped back.

Chiome and Ponta, on the other hand, immediately began to devour the cooked kraken with great relish.

I also enjoyed the cooked kraken but I couldn’t help wanting some sake and soy

sauce to go along with it.

But the two of them (?) seemed to have fallen in love with the taste of kraken.

“Money isn’t necessary, though you seem to really enjoy it Chiome-dono.”

When I said that Chiome broke eye-contact and scratched her cheek.

“Y-Yes. It is not often that I get to eat such delicious food..... Because I think my older brother would enjoy it, I wanted to bring some back as a souvenir.”

“Oh, you have an older brother Chiome-dono?”

I was taken back by her comment because Chiome hadn’t spoken about her family before.

However, she shook the head as she answered.

“No, even though I call him brother, he is a senior member of the six great ninjas. He bears the name Sasuke.”

Her eyebrows lowered and she looked off in the distance after she spoke.

It was a familiar name.

I remember it being brought up in the conversation Chiome and Hanzo the 22nd when I first visited the hidden village.

If I was remembering it correctly, Chiome had been asking about Sasuke’s whereabouts.

Since that conversation wasn’t something I should have heard, I thought about it for a bit before giving her an ambiguous response.

“I see, large quantiles had been dried so there should be enough for you to take home.”

Ariane didn’t have any interest in the food and there was only so much of it that I could use.

The leftovers were still half-dried and fried kraken seemed rather tempting as

long as I cut it into thin pieces.

It actually might be fun to sneakily give Ariane some, just to see what would happen. As that mischievous thought crossed my mind, a half-asleep Ariane made her way on deck with her hair still disheveled from sleep.

The lack of other women onboard and her voluptuous figure meant that the sailors' eyes immediately honed in on Ariane, just like when we boarded the ship.

I didn't know if she was aware of the stares, but the way she moved her body after a night spent in a narrow cabin only strengthened her already alluring feminine charms.

"Good morning Ariane-dono."

"Good morning Arc. Why are the beds in the cabin so hard..... because if that my body is sore all over."

Ariane rubbed her back and sighed after making that comment.

Just as I was about to say something to her, a sudden rustling on deck gathered everyone's attention.

When I focused my attention, I noticed the morning sun shining upon a town just off the starboard bow.

"We've arrived in Plymouth."

I heard someone's voice as I took in the sight of the huge coastal city.

It was larger than any human city I'd seen. Despite the fact that we were on a hundred-meter long ship, but it felt minuscule compared to the city.

I'd thought that the elven city Landria we sailed from was well developed, but Polymath outclassed it.

There weren't any high-rise tree-apartments like in eleven cities, but the architecture was similar to the buildings found in Rhoden Kingdom's capital, only spread out over a hilly landscape.

Chiome was openly expressing her surprise beside me.

“I’ve heard the stories but, this city is huge. It’s like a human city sprung up from the countryside.”

Ariane made a statement I had no choice but to agree.

“Judging from its size, it might house a hundred thousand people.....”

As the Liebbelta approached Plymouth’s port, we began to pass by other ships just heading out.

The crews we passed had a lot of of beastmen crewmembers moving cargo around their ships.

When the Liebbelta pulled into one of the city’s piers, the sturdy beastmen around us began work mooring the ship in place.

Once that was done, the unloading of the cargo began. After saying goodbye to the captain and collecting our baggage we crossed the wooden bridge and stepped onto the pier.

Beastmen guards wielding spears and dressed in light armor waited on the pier and all of the crewmen not taking part in the unloading had to have their baggage checked by them.

When Ariane pulled out a letter she received from Landria’s elder, the guards only looked it over before allowing us to enter Plymouth without issue.

Plymouth must’ve been the most energetic city I’ve ever visited.

While the majority of the people walking around were beastmen, a decent number of dark elf sailors were mixed in with them.

The outskirts of the port gave way to an open market, with various street vendors displaying their wares to the crowds of people trying to buy them.

While it seemed like we walked into the middle of a festival, someone suited in full body armor walking the marketplace was bound to draw attention.

“This is amazing..... We might lose sight of each other if we look away for a moment.”

Ariane spoke what crossed her mind behind me as the crowd of people parted ways for me as are little group advanced forward.

Though it had been my first voyage, I had no trouble with large crowds.

I was actually quite relaxed in urban settings, and after such a long absence of experiencing it, I was feeling a bit nostalgic being here.

Well, there was nothing I could do about it.

Instead, I focused on the various spices and other miscellaneous food that lined some of the stalls we passed.

Ponta’s tail restlessly wagged about as her eyes danced across all the food on display.

As my eyes continued to wander, I suddenly stopped at a certain stall because an ongoing argument caught my ear.

“What!? Why’s the price so much higher than usual!?”

The yelling customer was a wolf-eared man who was arguing with a bear-eared male stand owner about the price of certain spices.

“Isn’t it inevitable? The western tiger-tribe members have started to disappear. These are the last of my red nails you know?”

The bear-eared man stand owner looked down on the customer as if he were a nuisance and pressed him to buy or leave.

The wolf-eared man took his money and left the stall in a bit of a fit, being unwilling to pay such a high price for the spice.

As I watched the exchange play out, my feet unconsciously moved towards the street stall.

“Hey, Arc!? Are there some tomatoes over there?”

Ariane brought up the item that had brought us to the Southern Continent and made me act in a similar fashion the other day when she called out to me.

However, I was too busy moving towards the street stall to answer her.

My eyes were immediately drawn to the red nail item he was holding.

It was shaped like a claw and had the size of an index finger. Its flesh was a bright red color and a bit wrinkled.

This item..... was something I was familiar with.

“Shopkeeper, are these spicy?”

I picked up one of the red nails and asked the stall owner about its characteristics for confirmation.

The bear-eared man seems a little confused by the man in full-body armor’s sudden question, but he was quick to realize what I was asking.

“A-Ah. Despite their appearance, those are often referred to as the “devil nails” due to their spiciness.”

I was convinced of the nature of what I was holding by that answer.

.....these devil nails were red chili peppers.

Chapter 8: Harbor Town Plymouth ②

I never imaged that I would find chili peppers on this quest to obtain tomatoes in the Southern Continent. While tomatoes had many uses in cooking, red chili peppers were a versatile spice.

With both tomatoes and chili peppers, I could make arrabbiata.

Various Italian recipes started to flow into my head, and I frantically began searching nearby stall for the necessary ingredients and cooking implements.

Ariane came up behind me and tilted her neck a bit when she saw the ‘so-called’ devil nail in my hand.

“Huh? Are you going to buy those?”

“Yes, I didn’t know I would come across these here, and I’d like to buy some if possible.”

Ariane slowly turned toward the stall vendor and asked the price of the peppers after I said that.

When she heard it, her response mirrored the one of the wolf-eared man from before.

“What, how can you charge that ridiculous amount!?”

Ariane began chewing out the bear-eared vendor, with Chiome and me nodding our heads in agreement.

I unintentionally reached for my gold pouch when we I heard the price the vendor had set.

However, Ariane’s sharp eyes caught that motion and held out her hands to stop me from doing something foolish.

“Isn’t that price just a rip-off??”

While pressing the vendor Ariane voiced her criticism of him to me.

Her golden eyes spoke of how outrageous it would be to buy at the asking price..... and that look carried some weight behind it.

I looked to Chiome and strongly nodded to her to get her to agree.

All the while wondering what made the price such a hang up for her.

While I was contemplating the differences between men and women, the vendor began to explain his situation.

“Like I told the guy before, the price was lower than it is now, but the tiger tribesmen that were my suppliers have disappeared and I can’t replace my stock.”

Hearing his side of the situation explained why he was unwilling to negotiate the price.

Since chili peppers were dried goods they wouldn’t spoil that quickly, so the vendor could just wait for a buyer willing to pay his price.

Ariane also realized this and frowned in disappointment.

However, her face showed that she wasn’t willing to buy at the asking price, and I wouldn’t be able to buy the peppers at this rate.

Well, let’s change the approach a bit.

“Vender-dono, do you know of any other shops that deal in devil nails?”

No merchant would purposely direct business to his rivals.

The vendor shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as expected.

“The western tiger tribe only recently begun to distribute devil nails in this region, there are almost no other places that sale them. If you think I’m lying, you’re welcome to search the market yourself.”

The vendor snorted and broke eye contact while crossing his arms, so I turned to Ariane to see what she know.

She nodded and chimed in on what the vendor had said.

“I’ve never seen them before. You don’t come across them in Canada at least.....”

“Then where can I find the tiger tribe to buy the nails directly?”

Even with a brief look around the market, I couldn’t find any tiger-eared people.

If the vendor told me where to find the tiger tribe the situation would solve itself, but he remained silent and let me continue my search in vain.

It was only natural for a customer to seek out the producer of a good they sought in this situation.

However, the vendor had no reason to tell me anything.

As I tried to come up with a way to trip up the vendor, Ariane butted into the conversation.

“Arc, why do you wanna buy these things? From what we heard these things are dangerous, right? The same thing with the Kraken, why are you only interested in the strangest things?”

Ariane seemed a bit mystified by my behavior but it was Chiome and Ponta that objected to her comment.

“..... Kraken is delicious!” “Kyun!”



There was earnest look in her clear blue eyes as Chiome and the fur ball atop my head stood in solidarity.

Though they missed the point I accepted their backing and held up the pepper in my hand.

“You can make various delicious thing by using this and tomatoes. Therefore, I would like to buy some at a more reasonable price.”

Ariane raised an eyebrow at what I said. But the vendor reacted before she could say anything.

“You’re planning to cook with devil nails!? Those of the tiger tribe use them to boost their fighting spirits by cooking them, but barely anyone else does that!”

I looked towards the shocked vendor and asked him to elaborate.

“Then, what are Devil’s nails used for besides cooking?”

I couldn’t think of any other use for them at the moment.

Chiome and Ariane looked between me and the vendor as our conversation had peeked their interest.

“They’re usually boiled till they bleed out, and the juices are used as a monster and insect repellent. I also heard that squeezing them into your nose can temporarily increase one’s strength.”

If I’m not mistaken then the capsaicin in red chili peppers had antiseptic properties as well as being an effective insecticide, but squeezing it into your nose? Was it some kind of curse?

However, I understood. The members of the tiger tribe were rumored to use them in cooking, but confirmation of that fact hadn’t reached this town yet.

“Since only the extremely curious would be interested in these, there’s no need to hide the supplier. All I have to do is ask around about the tiger tribe in order to find them.”

The vendor said that members of the tribe haven’t been seen around here

recently, but it should be easy to find a clue about their location and buy the devil nails directly.

I started to look towards the other vendors with that thought in mind.

Then the bear-eared vendor sighed and scratched the back of his head.

“Hah, that’s true. The tiger tribe mainly deals in monster leather and fangs. They usually reside in the Kuwana plains, just beyond the Shingarika plains. The tribe is often sighted around Fernandez, just west of here. If you follow the Dojasu river you should reach it.”

Somewhat reluctantly, the vendor revealed the location of the tiger tribe members.

I was ignorant of this continent’s geography so I turned to Ariane when I heard the name of the town, but she was also unfamiliar with those places so she only shook her head.

“Fernandez is ten days away by carriage and twenty days by foot. Do you actually plan to make such a trek?”

A fatherly smile floated on the vendor’s face, as Ariane silently looked on.

There was quite a bit of distance to cover in order to reach the town. The vendor’s smile widened as he was assured of his victory. Even if we went through the hardships of reaching the town, there was no guarantee we could buy the items at a cheaper price.

My short-distance transfer magic Dimensional Step should be able to deal with the distance problem. I’d guess that it would take three days to reach the town of Fernandez by using that.

While I thought it over, Ariane’s gaze landed on the baggage over my shoulder.

“Arc. You have some magic stones in your bag right?”

At her question, I was reminded of the magic stones I had collected in the caverns before we came upon that underground lake. Due to the picturesque nature of the underground lake I should be able to use Transfer Gate and

collect some more of them so long as intercontinental travel wasn't an issue.

I nodded at her question considering all of that.

"I have a few of them, do you need a specific number of them?"

Still unable to see her intentions, I gave her a frank reply that managed to put a smile on her luscious lips.

She seems to have thought of something.....

"Follow me. Arc. Since we're already here, we might as well stretch our legs."

Ariane turned on her heel and began walking away from the vendor.

"C-Coming!"

Before the vendor could complain about her departure, I took out a gold coin and handed it to him.

"Sorry, Vender-dono. Could you give me however many devil nails this covers?"

The reason I relented was as a thank you for the information on the tiger tribe and I still wanted to sample the peppers.

The vendor acknowledged that there was no further room for negotiations as he watched Ariane walk off, so he reluctantly took the gold coin.

Although he was a bit suspicious of the coin when he saw the emblem engraved on it, after I explained that it was from the human kingdom on the Northern Continent, the exchange came to an end.

I was handed several devil nails in return, and after using the gold coin I had just paid to calculate the price for one of them, the mere thought of buying them en masse paralyzed me.

Even if currency exchange was taken into account, I had just been handed a value pack of devil nails with none of the value.

A price that reached the value of gold, I couldn't help but remember how I had heard once that pepper had been worth its weight in gold at one time.

“No, at these rates gold isn’t the proper unit.....”

My hand moved to my money pouch as I stared at the devil nails.

When I caught up to Ariane and Chiome I asked her what she had in mind.

“Where are we going?”

“Remember what I told you before we came here? Though there shouldn’t be many of them, there should be a transfer magic shrine network set up in this country. I don’t know if we can directly travel to Fernandez but it should be faster than taking the highway, right?”

Ariane raised her brow as she looked back in my direction. Chiome was taken back when she remember that conversation.

I groaned a little when she brought up that conversation from not that long ago.

“Hmm, I see. The only question is if the shrine network is open to the public.”

“Since using it requires a village elder to grant permission, what are the actual chances of us being allowed to travel to Fernandez?”

Ariane’s status as daughter of a village elder probably allowed her to gain the necessary access to the shrine network, an advantage that we lacked here.

If the shrine network was opened to the public, it would mean that a looser management system was in place.

For now I pushed those thoughts aside and paid attention to the street we were heading down. Both sides of the street were lined with three-story tall buildings and had various types of beastmen going about their business.

Though, it was actually a peculiar carriage that caught my attention. If you could call it a carriage, that is...

There wasn’t a single horse hooked up to the chassis.

Instead, there was a goat-like creature pulling it along. The creature had two ram horns jolting up from its head and it was covered in silk-like black fur

everywhere but its face.

However, the creature was the size of a horse and showed no strain as it pulled the fully packed carriage.

There were two beastmen guards protecting the carriage. They wore matching uniforms and had swords attached to their waist as they rode two-meter tall birds. The height of the bird allowed them to easily see above the heads of the crowd. The birds' wings were a bit small compared to their bodies and their feather where a dark brown color except for their white heads. This feature coupled with its yellow beak drew up the image of bald eagles in my mind.

“Hmm, I should have expected to find unknown animals here.” “Kyun!”

“These horse-like birds seem to be fast runners.”

Ariane called out to Chiome, Ponta and me as we stopped to evaluate the carriage passing us by.

“Arc, Chiome-chan, the sun will set if we don't hurry!”

After confirming where we were headed, Ariane urged us to continue weaving our way through the crowd.

After an hour of walking, we reached the center of the city where a large solemn building stood in the center of a small field.

The seemingly Middle Eastern building was made from a lapis lazuli colored stone decorated with shiny filigree patterns. There was a baggage check station in front of the building's entrance and guards could be seen all around the area.

“This seems to be this country's transfer shrine network.”

Ariane made that comment as she approached the main gate, with the rest of us in tow.

The building in front of us was more like a temple than a shrine.

As we neared the gate of the transfer magic 'shrine', one of the beastmen guards gave Ariane a strange look before singling us out.

“It’s unusual to see a female dark elf around here, are you planning to use the transfer formation?”

Ariane nodded at the guard’s question before asking her own.

“Yes, is it possible to reach Fernandez or a nearby town?”

“You can transfer to Fernandez, but it’s impossible today. Today’s two formations are linked to the capital city Galapagos.”

The guard gestured at the line of people at the gate with his chin as he spoke.

According to him, the formation was frequently set to the capital (?), whereas transfers to other cities were only available for a limited number of people every day.

But more importantly, the capital was named after the islands the evolution theory was based upon.

“The three of you will exceed the limit of people for tomorrow’s transfer to Fernandez. I suggest you come back in two days when the schedule opens up. You can also pay half the fee in advance so that your name is placed on the register.”

That was how Ariane’s question was answered.

Given the circumstances, doing so must cost a considerable amount of money. Even though the price seemed to scale with the quantity of your baggage, the coins we had weren’t suitable for major circulation.

It felt like we were being presented with the foreign voyage cost of the early Showa period.

“Is it possible to pay the fee in magic stones?”

“Yes, there’s an appraisal station off to the side that can determine a price point.”

The guard led us to the station before returning to his post.

The station in front of us would appraise the magic stones and calculate the

usage fee based on their quality. If we were fortunate enough, then the cost could be covered by the stones I brought along.

After handing over all the magic stones I had for appraisal, they were exchanged for their monetary value. It turned out that the reservation only cost half of the payout, so I pocketed the difference.

We were also handed marked wooden plaques for the transfer formation. Basically some kind of passport.

“This should take care of our expenses in this country of a while.....”

The leather pouch in my hand held the money and passport that we had just received, and I looked back at Ariane and Chiome as I spoke.

“The group going to Fernandez won’t be announced until noon tomorrow, so traveling outside of this town is restricted. We should find an inn somewhere.”

When we reached the town square Ariane crossed her arms and started looking around the area as she brought up our schedule.

Chiome restlessly moved about as she stood beside me.

“Something wrong Chiome-dono?”

“N-No. I was just thinking about what we learned about the tiger tribe. From what I heard, the tiger tribe excels in martial arts. There only a few of them on the Northern Continent, so I’ve never met one before.”

Chiome looked like a boy anxious to meet his hero with her unusual expressive face.

While I stared at her, the image of a muscular giant suddenly appeared beside her, accompanied by a sense of déjà vu.

“According to the vendor, they haven’t been making that many appearances recently..... I do hope you can meet them, Chiome-dono. I would also like to purchase more devil nails from them.

When she heard this Ariane pointed a finger at me in protest.

“Arc, did you actually buy some devil nails from that vendor? I thought you found the tiger tribe’s location so that you could buy them wholesale.”

Ariane puffed out her chest and pouted in dissatisfaction as she spoke.

Though she had already walked off by then, her excellent warrior-senses and deductive reasoning shouldn’t be underestimated.

“I bought a few of them for sampling. I was thinking of buying the necessary materials in the market and cooking up something with the devil nails.”

I grasped my fist as I spoke, but Chiome and Ariane gave me a confused look.

“Arc, you can cook?”

Her question was actually reasonable when I thought about it.

I haven’t cooked anything for myself since I came to this world. However, I had lived alone for many years.....and I became quite competent in my cooking because of that.

“Hmhmhm, let me show you my ability. You all will bear witness to my cooking skills!”

Since it’s been a while since I last cooked, let’s make some arrabbiata pasta with the devil nails and tomatoes. I remember that garlic and onions were available in the market, so they should be easily obtainable.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Realizing what was happening, Ponta began joyfully wagging her tail and crying atop my head.

The devil nails might be a little too much for Ponta, so I need to remove them from her portion.

Chapter 9: Border Town Fernandez

①

Let's start with the outcome first.

The cooking didn't turned out too bad..... no, considering I'd been in an unfamiliar environment, the food came out pretty good if, I do say so myself.

Ariane was a little teary-eyed when she first started eating, but as the deliciousness of the spicy Arrabiata sauce dawned on her, she began considering to bring the devil nails back to Canada.

The stimulation was a little too much for Chiome's tongue at first, but it wasn't long before her plate was empty.

It was good that the devil nails weren't as spicy as I thought they could have been, compared to regular red chili peppers. The sauce did have bit more of a kick to it, though.

While I was cooking, Ariane saw me toss out the seeds and capsaicin glands, and there was a brief interrogation about why I was wasting something I spent so much money on.

Since the capsaicin, which is what was causing the intense burning taste, was concentrated around the core of the pepper, it would be rather dangerous to use that part for cooking.

To prove my point, I suggested to Ariane that she should put a small piece of the core into her mouth, waited for the expected result.

In the end, Ariane had tears in her eyes when she took her first bite of the Arrabiata. Fortunately, the taste of the devil nails come through and she was able to enjoy it.

If I had to point out an issue..... it would be how difficult it was to adjust the fire as I cooked.

When I added the homemade penne, I noticed that part of the sauce had been burnt.

The tomatoes had a pungent taste, but unfortunately the burnt part added a slight bitterness in the end.

Though, the penne turned out unexpectedly well.

Since the wheat dough used was originally used to make bread, the finished penne had a dusty texture to it.

When it came to kneading the dough, I was grateful for my enhanced strength.

After mentioning the problems with the fire, Ariane informed me of a magic tool stove that was capable of adjusting the heat.

Unfortunately, this item hadn't spread far beyond elven villages despite how long ago it had been created.

The reason being that the magic stones used to power the stove were more expensive than firewood.

Still, the adjustable heat was an attractive feature and it was something worth looking into when we returned. I could always gather the magic stones from the cavern whenever I needed them, and it would be more efficient for me to use than firewood was.

While I planned the construction of my future kitchen, Ariane stepped up beside me and urged me forward.

I nodded and looked ahead of me.

We now stood in front of Plymouth's transfer shrine just beyond the gate.

Two days have already passed since then and we were now about to travel to Fernandez.

After handing over our passes and the other half of the money, we were ushered into the line we were currently waiting in.

Currently, my helmet was under my arm and I would re-hydrate with the hot spring water in my canteen.

A group composed of a brown-skinned elf, a female dark elf, a spirit beast and a cat-eared ninja certainly gathered the attention of those around us.

Once our turn finally arrived, we were allowed to enter the shrine after a brief questioning.

The exterior appearance of the shrine, with its multitude of spires, made it out to be a complex structure. However, the interior was a simple box-shaped room with a semicircular domed ceiling. The walls of the shrine had been completely covered with a mosaic of various flora and fauna.

“Amazing.....”

As comment leaked from my lips I looked the quality artwork, it was I was a tourist on a sightseeing trip.

There were four oriental pillars stationed in the corners of the large altar that sat in the center of the room. There were also sets of stairs on each side of the elevated altar.

The other people taking this trip were already standing on the altar with their baggage and followers, talking amongst themselves as they waited.

Considering the amount of money it took to use the transfer altar, you’d think that the wealthy were the main patrons.

However, given the number of people waiting on the altar, the traveling time of twenty days must have been enough of a motivation to pay the price.

As I climbed up the stairs, all conversation stopped and everyone’s eyes focused on me for a moment before someone called from below.

“It time! The transfer to Fernandez shall begin shortly! Please make your way to the center of the altar!”

A handheld bell, like those used in marketplace lotteries, rang out as a person who seemed to be in charge shouted out directions.

The entire hall became a bit noisy as the warning bell rang.

Not long after, the huge magic formation carved into the altar began to shine such an intense light that I unintentionally narrowed my eyes.

Similar to the formations used in the elven villages, I had a momentary feeling of weightlessness, and then we suddenly saw a different scenery.

The place we were now wasn't all that different from the shrine we'd just been, but the decorations were rather plain in comparison.

The transfer went through without a problem.

"The convenience of transfer magic is impressive as ever....."

Chiome expressed her amazement as she confirmed our surroundings with her own eyes.

I couldn't help but agree with her.

"Since the magic stones needed to power the transfer increase with the number of people, this method's drawback is its inflexibility. The network in the forest is only capable of five people at most..... If you think about it, the magic Arc uses is a bit weird."

Ariane's half-closed eyes honed in on the canteen of water I had retrieved from the hot spring near the Dragon King's tree this morning.

It had been a test to see if my long-distance transfer magic, Transfer Gate, was capable of traveling between continents.

It was a day away by ship, but that was only possible with the advanced ships the elves possessed. The distance between the two continents should be seven hundred kilometers at least.

It wasn't an exaggeration to call an ability to cover that much distance instantaneously strange.

Common sense dictated that continent-spanning teleportation would require a considerable amount of mana to fuel it.

The same amount of mana was used to transfer in the game no matter where I went. If mana consumption was proportional to distance traveled, then the magic I used wouldn't be all that different from the shrine network.

“Well, it's good that travel between the continents is easier...”

I followed everyone else down the stairs while doing my best to avoid eye contact with Ariane and laugh her statement off.

As we left the shrine, we took a look around Fernandez's town square which had some similarities to Plymouth's.

However, there were visible differences in scenery between two towns.

Unlike Plymouth, the town lacked the bustling commercial harbor, an impressively high wall surrounded the town. The wall, in tandem with the rough building structure that dominated the town, gave the place the feeling of a fortified city.

Since it was described as a border town, maybe the town acted as a defensive line of sorts.

The beastmen with good physiques, those dressed as soldiers or those trying to be inconspicuous, really stood out.

“For now, let's look around for members of the tiger tribe.”

After I put my helmet back on, I looked back to Ariane and Chiome as they nodded at my suggestion.

Ponta's hind legs dangled aimlessly as Chiome held her to her chest and her nose twitched as she took in the scent of this new town.

The lack of Plymouth's harbor district meant that she couldn't smell the tide this far inland.

I began to scan the face of the people passing by to find a hint about the people I was looking for.

When I called out to a nearby stall owner, I was met with a suspicious stare.

“Excuse me, would you know where to find the tiger tribe?”

The man started to smile when I took a gold coin from my waist pouch and held it in front of him.

“Oh, the tiger tribe? I haven’t seen any around the last couple of days.”

“..... I see.”

Judging that I wouldn’t find much here I started to pull back the gold coin when wrinkles appeared on the man’s forehead and he rushed to speak again.

“W-Wait, fine sir! If I’m not mistaken, there’s a stable near the southern wall that has extensive dealings with the tiger tribe!”

“Hmm?”

I was looking for the tiger tribe, not the mounts that they used.

I closed my fist on the gold coin in my hand and looked the man in the eye as I asked him to elaborate.

The man’s eyes traveled to Ariane besides me and gained some sort of understanding as he started speaking again.

“I couldn’t tell because of the weighty armor you wear, but you’re an elf, aren’t you, sir? It’s no surprise that you’re unaware of the circumstances. Dragon riding is a huge part of the tiger tribe’s culture. They acquire their lifetime mounts once they reach adulthood, so this is no trifling matter. It’s an inextinguishable disgrace for tribesmen to lose their mount.”

I was able to pick up the gist of what the man was trying to say.

“So, if I want to find the tiger tribe members I should look there first?”

“Yes. The owner of the stable occasionally does business with the tribe, if anyone knows about them it would be him. It’s the truth, I swear!”

I looked down at the man enthusiastically nodding his head, and flipped the gold coin in his direction.

Looking away from the pleased man, I turn towards Ariane, who looked rather doubtful.

“Aren’t you paying a bit too much for that information?”

“The value of information varies from person to person..... It was a reasonable expense for me.”

I shrugged my shoulders as I answered her question.

The bit of information the man gave us told us that the tiger tribe hadn’t been seen recently. I didn’t know the reason for their lack of appearances but learning about the stable frequented by the tiger tribe was worth the price.

The worst case was that I wouldn’t be able to find the tiger tribe in this town, so I would just have to go to the Kuwana plain to find them myself.

“Well, let’s go look around the southern wall for the stable.”

I hoisted my baggage over my shoulder and triumphantly began to walk away before Chiome called out to me.

“Arc-dono, isn’t south in that direction?” “Kyun!”

I turned around immediately and started off in the direction she pointed out.

Whenever I visited a new city I would often get turned around.

I avoided Ariane’s cold stare and quickly headed towards the wall that rose in the distance.

Chapter 10: Border Town Fernandez

②

It seems that the wall didn't cover the town completely.

When I looked back for a second, I noticed that there were opening in certain sections of the wall. We were heading south so the openings laid north and west of here.

I had heard that Fernandez was built near a river, so maybe the river was flowing through these openings.

Thanks to those easily noticeable landmarks it wasn't difficult to roughly estimate our current direction.

We continued to on our way, passing people going about their own business, until we eventually came upon a large gate built into the town wall.

Seems like we've reached the southern gate.

Next to the gate were pastures enclosed with wooden fences, inside which I could see some of the large, two-legged birds and the big, cart-pulling, ram-like creatures I had noticed before.

One of the several nearby buildings was the stable we were looking for.

"Seems like there are several stables in this area....."

"Arc-dono, isn't it just over there?"

"Kyun!"

Ignoring Ariane's mutter as she was looking at the scenery around us, Chiome pointed at a small enclosure with a single creature in it.

Judging by Ponta's response, she had also noticed the same sight as the person who was currently holding her..

In the corner of the pasture Chiome was pointing out stood a mount different from the rams and eagles in the other pastures.

This creature seemed to be reptilian in appearance.

In fact, a better description of the creature was that of a small dinosaur I'd seen in an illustration a while back. It looked the universally recognizable triceratops.

The creature was four meters long from head to tail, but I couldn't judge its height because it was laying down at the moment.

Its whole body was covered in reddish-brown scales and two horns grow from the top of its head. However, unlike regular dinosaurs, there was a trail of white fur traveling down its back to the tip of its tail.

Another difference between the creature and the illustration was that the creature had six legs.

While there was quite the difference in appearance, the behavior seemed to be the same since the creature was leisurely chewing on the foliage that grew around it.

"So, that's the mount?"

I voiced my doubts as we approached the pen with the dinosaur creature.

I never saw a creature like this anywhere else in Fabuna'ha, so was this one of the powerful mounts that the tiger tribe used?

An elderly rabbit-eared man called out to us as I contemplated things.

"Oh, a visitor. Do you need a mount? Excuse me for asking, but are you imperial guards from the capital?"

The rabbit-eared man was on the short side and his ears twitched about as he took note of my armor and politely questioned us.

"..... We're from an elven village from the Northern Continent. We're just looking around a little."

The man eye's bulged when he heard Ariane's self-introduction.

"Is that so, it's unusual to see an elf in Fernandez after all. Are you lot in need of a mount? How fast do you need to go? How heavy is the load?"

The rabbit man had a smile on his face as he started showing off two bipedal eagles that were grazing in another pasture.

We seem to have come across a stable owner.

I quickly cut off the rabbit-eared man's sales pitch and brought up the reason we were actually here.

"I'd heard that a stable in this area dealt with the special type of mount that the tiger tribe uses. Would you know anything about that?"

"..... Y-yes, I know about that situation, but why are you asking?"

The man became a little suspicious after hearing my question, but I simply shrugged my shoulders and explained our purpose here.

"I would like to contact the tiger tribe about obtaining some devil nails from them directly. We were told by a merchant that a certain stable owner would know the current whereabouts of the tribe, so we came here in search of that person."

The stable owner nodded and smiled along in understanding.

"Ah, so that's it. Certainly, a lot of effort is needed to tame their mounts as you can see. Honestly, I'm still waiting for someone to pick up the dragon mount over there....."

The stable owner relaxed his stance as he spoke and looked towards the six-legged dinosaur creature.

Looks like Chiome wasn't mistaken when she pointed out this creature as one of the tiger tribe's mounts.

I then locked eyes with the elderly rabbit-eared man.

Probably out of sympathy, the rabbit-eared man gave me a bitter smile that showcased his wrinkles.

“Obtaining a dragon mount is a rite of passage for the tiger tribe, and they become inseparable with their mounts. I picked up this stray in the hopes of claiming some kind of reward, but the tribesmen haven’t been seen around town recently.....”

The man paused for a moment as he made his way over to the fence and sighed heavily.

“As you can see, a dragon mount’s diet consists of grass, but the sheer quantity they consume costs a small fortune to keep this one here. Still, if I were to toss this fellow back into the plains, the tiger tribe’s trust that took me years to build up would be destroyed in an instant.....”

A flash of sorrow appeared in the man’s eyes while he spoke.

Even as the stable owner’s eyes pleaded with me, I could only feel troubled by the enormous request his monologue was implying.

However, his statement had confirmed that the tiger tribe hadn’t visited the town for a while, and it was likely that we’d have to go to the Kuwana plains.

“Hmm, how many days will it take to reach the Kuwana plains from this town?”

I could feel the lights spark in the stable owner’s eyes as I asked about the distance from here to the tiger tribe’s home.

“After you cross the Dojasu river it’ll take about ten days to pass through the Singalika plains, then you’ll just need to cross the Sheila river to reach the Kuwana plains. However, it would be rather reckless to traverse the plains on foot. I can prepare a black ram for you, if you’d like?”

The stable owner offered a large smile as he directed attention towards the large ram-like creatures in another pen.

The problem was just that his offer was unnecessary to us because of the transfer magic I already had.

Certainly, pushing our baggage on a pack animal would be convenient, and it did present an opportunity to live out a fantasy adventure.....

I weighed the options as I looked down at Ponta, who was still being carried by Chiome.

“Kyun?”

Ponta tilted head and gave me a questioning look before I returned my gaze to the dragon mount.

“Customer, you have to agree with the dangers traversing the plains, don’t you? The openness of the plains means that people can be easily spotted by predators and monsters. Mounts are a necessity in escapes and useful in keeping night watch. Since these mounts are originally from the plains, they are highly sensitive to nocturnal monster attacks.”

Monster attacks wouldn’t be much of an issue during the day, but I doubted I would be able to find nocturnal monsters at night or use transfer magic. Thought Ariane’s and Chiome’s night vision should solve that problem.

The stable owner continued to press his point as I tried to think things through.

“Customer, if you intend to visit the Kuwana plains, why not take the dragon mount with you? As you can see, these fellow doesn’t lack the fangs and horns of monsters and returning him to the tiger tribe should make negotiates easier to facilitate. What do you have to lose?”

A gentle smile remained on the stable owner’s lips when he finished speaking.

He was trying to push his problem on us under the guise of doing us a favor. Nothing the stable own said was irrational and it was only normal that he would attempt to do this.

The smiling face of a certain young, human merchant came to mind and I had to clear my head with a shake.

“If you return the dragon mount I’ll give you a cheap price on a different mount.”

I was a bit confused as the owner started rubbing his hands together and chuckling.

“If we take the dragon mount why would we need another one? It should easily be able to handle three people.”

Ariane, who’d been silently listening to the story, nodded in agreement.

The own waved his hands back and forth to deny our assertion.

“N-No, that is, if you were able to ride it then you certainly could..... but excluding me, this mount won’t allow anyone whose strength it doesn’t recognize to take its reins. Unless someone from the tiger tribe is handling it, taking the reins is all but impossible.....”

The old man stopped for a moment to wipe his forehead and catch his breath.

“How do tiger tribesmen usually master these fellows?”

Chiome had also become interested in the conversation and asked the old stable owner a question.

“.....W-well it’s a relatively simple process to be honest..... The tiger tribesmen usually have a test of strength with the dragon mount.”

I glanced at the large lizard grazing about when I heard that answer.

I nodded my head at his remark. It was probably impossible for an ordinary person to match the pure strength of a creature with the reptile’s weight class.

If you were speaking of people that could potentially do it other than me..... it would have to be one of the bear clan members I saw in Chiome’s village and maybe one of the six great ninjas I know.

“Well then, I’ll try to best it in a test of strength here.”

I put the baggage I’d been carrying on the ground and approached the fence.

When he noticed what I was doing, the stable own froze for a moment before rushing to stop me.

“Wait, Wait, don’t be so unreasonable! He may seem docile now, but he’ll send anyone that challenges him flying! Even those of the tiger clan, with their incomparable strength, have been known to be tossed aside!”

Those in the immediate area took an interest in what was happening as the old man shouted.

I easily hopped over the fence in my armor and made my way over to where the dragon mount was sitting.

When it noticed that I had entered its territory, the mount’s yellow eyes narrowed as it focused on me.

“Hey, some idiot’s gonna challenge a dragon mount to a test of strength!”

One of the curious spectator’s shout managed to draw the interest of even more people.

“That guy in the armor? Hey, armor guy, do you think the weight of that armor will be enough to hold down a dragon mount?”

“That armored guy’s not a tiger tribesmen is he?”

I could hear the jeering of the crowd as they came watch the impromptu show they were being treated to.

I ignored them and locked eyes with the dragon mount.

The dragon mount growled without taking its eyes off me and stood up.

The dragon mount’s lumbering, reddish-brown figure slowly walked up to stand opposite to me.

A sudden gust of wind blows through the dragon’s white mane as it began raking the ground and aimed its horns at me.

I hammered my fist into my palm in an attempt to provoke it.

“I’ll play with you with all of my strength.”

Giyuriiiiiii!!

The moment I said that the dragon mount let out a high-pitched roar that didn't match it's lumbering figure and charged me.

The dull impact that rang out caused the spectators to give a heated cheer.



I'd managed to catch the dragon mount's horns under my armpits, which brought an end to its charge. Even now I could hear people shouting and making bets while I grappled with the beast.

Paying no mind to those voices, I began to smile as the dragon mount started to push me back.

"Hmm, as expected of the prideful dragon mount..... you are the greatest test of my strength yet."

Those were my honest feelings.

The heavenly knight was classified as a magical swordsman. While I couldn't match a pure warrior build, the strength of a max level character far surpassed that of an ordinary man.

However, there were multiple creatures in this world that could oppose me with their own power. It made me realize the dangers of wholeheartedly being devoted to a strength in battle.

But that was for another time because I couldn't lose here.

When my feet started to dig ditches into the ground, I grabbed hold of the mount's white mane and bent down to lower my center of gravity.

Gyuriigiyuriiiiiii!!!

The dragon mount furiously began shaking its head back and forth in an attempt to break my hold, while I slowly started to apply pressure to it.

"Haaaaaaaaa!!!"

Firing myself up, I threw all of my power into my hold on the dragon mount's neck.

As the mount started to falter the upset screams of the crowd reached my ears.

Before long, the dragon mount could no longer resist and a cloud of dust rose up as its reddish-brown body fell to the ground.

“Ahhhh, seriously!? That guy managed to bring down a beast that not even the tiger tribesmen could!?”

“See for yourself, looks like I won!!”

While some of the adventurers and mercenaries were celebrating on the other side of the fence Ariane looked on with a disinterested expression.

However, the celebration was cut short with the dragon mount slowly stood back up.

Gyurii

Although it seemed a little disappointed, the dragon mount bent a knee to me and lowered its neck.

It seems to have recognized my strength and was willing to let me ride.

Unlike its armor-like scales, the white fur that covered dragon mount’s back was rather soft.

The mount’s reptilian eyes narrowed and it started to purr as I stroked its fur.

I slowly walked to its side before leaping onto the mount’s back.

Gyurii

After I give it a signal, the dragon mount stood up while carrying me.

As expected, the view from this high up was impressive.

When I looked down at the crowd, I caught sight of the old stable owner frozen with his mouth left agape.

With a slight kick I got the dragon mount to start moving, he started moving his six legs in tandem in the old stable owner’s direction.

“Merchant-dono, could you provide us with saddles suitable for our trip?”

When I made that comment with a chuckle the old man started nodding his head with a smile on his face.

We've now obtained directions to the Kuwana plains and a bargaining chip in the process.

Chapter 11: Traversing the Plains

The next day, when the sun had yet to illuminate the landscape.

However, unlike the humans of this world, the low levels of light wasn't a hindrance to elves and beastmen. Even with sunrise still being a while away, the residents of the town were already energetically moving about.

After receiving the dragon mount and obtaining a saddle, we spent the rest of the day buying the equipment and other items we would need to traverse the plains before checking into an inn for the night.

While the old stable owner considered the dragon mount a nuisance because of the resource its maintenance drained, the beast's sheer size and strength easily allowed three people to ride it.

From the stable owner's point of view, taking in the dragon mount caused such large loss in profit that there were tears in his eyes when he saw us off yesterday.

At the very least, our agreement to return the dragon mount to the tiger tribe must have been a weight lifted off his shoulders.

That's what has happened up till now.

Currently, we were waiting on the bridge in the northwestern district of Fernandez that hung over the Dojasu river.

The river beneath the bridge was about two— or three hundred meters across.

There were multiple small ships anchored on the side of the town that faced the river, and I could make out the figures of a few sailors from here. This river probably acted as a natural canal.

I turned away from the river bank and looked ahead.

The bridge was a drawbridge that extended to river's opposite bank, thick chains connected half of the bridge to the town wall. It was most likely designed this way to allow larger ships to pass through.

We, along with several others, were currently waiting for the bridge to drop into place.

The other people waiting could be divided into two categories, there were the adventurers dressed in light armor and the farmers holding various gardening tools.

As usual, all eyes were focused on us.

As a cat-eared person Chiome didn't stand out all that much, but my silver full-body armor and jet-black mantle blowing in the wind couldn't go unnoticed. The same could be said for Ariane golden eyes and white hair, since dark elves were a rarity in this town. To top it off, our baggage was packed onto the dragon mount's massive body.

The dragon mount was more than four meters long and it stood taller than I did. The fact that only members of the tiger tribe have been seen riding this beast also guaranteed that our group would arouse attention.

Instead of sitting in her usual spot atop my head, Ponta was comfortably resting in the dragon mount's white mane.

Occasionally she would happily wag her tail and the dragon mount would start yawning, not seeming to mind the little fox's presence.

Since the mane was pure white it was easy to spot Ponta's fluffy tail at a distance, even though she was moving around on her own.

Nevertheless.....

“.....Are you gonna be alright at such a height?”

“Kyun?”

Ponta tilted her neck to the side when that comment slipped from my mouth.

While the dragon mount's head was only slightly above my own, I worried as I looked up to Ponta.

“Fufu, maybe she wasn't attached to you, Arc, but to the feeling of perching in a

high tree.”

After seeing my interaction with Ponta, Ariane voiced her thoughts about the situation.

Chiome shook her head and shrugged her shoulders as she listens Ariane’s comment.

Suddenly the sound of metal scraping metal filled the area as the drawbridge was lowered.

With a ‘thud’, the two sides of the bridge connected at the center of the river and people begin to moving at once.

When I climbed on the back of the dragon mount, Ponta leaped to her usual spot atop my helmet.

“Ponta, you.....”

“Kyun!”

I wonder if it was a racial trait as I sighed and held out a helping hand to Ariane who was still chuckling about this whole thing.

After I took her hand, Ariane agilely climbed up and settled herself behind me.

Chiome managed to leap onto the dragon mount’s back and sit in front of me.

We had decided upon the sitting arrangement beforehand and once I took the reins and lightly kicked its sides, the dragon mount began to advance.

Contrary to its appearance of a slow-witted, armored reptile, the dragon mount skillfully maneuvered its six legs and kept pace with the crowd.

“Hey, Arc, aren’t you going a little fast?”

Ariane suddenly clinging to me caught my attention as she appeared to have lost her balance.

In order for everyone to ride the dragon mount, I had to tie my shield to the side of the mount. As a result, the sensation of Ariane pressing her twin hills against

me was transmitted through my armor.

However, I was still in armor so I couldn't actually feel anything. Such a pity.

Ariane's eyes started to bore into the back of my head the moment I had that trifle thought.

"Arc, did something indecent just cross your mind?"

"..... Whatever do you mean?"

Fearing Ariane's nearly psychic intuition I sidestepped her suspicions and focused on the scenery.

Unlike the well-maintained large field I saw on the side of the river Fernández sat at, there were only small disorganized fields on the opposite bank.

Since we'd been told that many monsters inhabited the Singalika plains beyond the river, there was probably a limited amount of cultivated land.

Since humans had apparently settled down in the land beyond the plains, this setup was probably a defensive measure.

After watching the farmers tend to their personal fields for awhile I looked away as we passed them by.

As the dragon mount left the cultivated zone, a seemingly endless plain opened up before our eyes. Small bushes were clustered around the trees and I occasionally caught sight of monster shadows moving about.

It was comparable to the savanna.

"Hmm, I don't see any sign of the 'Black Forest' the stable owner mentioned....."

When I made that comment while taking a look around, Ariane and Chiome began to scan the area as well.

The stable owner we received the dragon mount from warned us to avoid entering the "Black Forest" at all cost.

It was a large forest that spread out south of the two major plains and was also referred to as the “Demon Forest” and the “Forest of Death”. A place only the foolish would enter without being prepared.

“This is a considerable large plain, we might not come across it unless we deviate south.....

Chiome’s cat ears stood up as she continued to survey and looked up to me.

“You’re probably right. However, it’ll be hard to judge the direction without a landmark.”

It hadn’t been long since we crossed the and if I looked back I could still spot the town, but the scenery will eventually start to fade into itself once the road ended, and we could simply get lost.

.....Hmm? I remember having a similar thought somewhere before.....

Before I could ponder about my feeling of deja vu Ariane poked me in the back.

“Since Chiome and I are here, you just have to look forward and hold the reins properly, Arc.”

I simply shrugged my shoulders and tightened hold my on the reins in response.

When I gave the single to start running, the dragon mount began to increase its speed. My body was pushed back by the sudden acceleration and the scenery started to pass by in a blur. The rocking also intensified as a result.

Unfortunately, there wasn’t a speedometer, but we must have been going the speed of a standard-sized car.

While I was marveled at the dragon mount’s impressive physical capabilities, an unexpected scream reached my ear.

“Kyaa!!? Sl-Slow down, cut back! Kyaa!!?”

Ariane basically clung to my waist as she screamed and pleaded.

When I looked back I saw her eyes were shut and she was holding on for dear

life.

I eased up on the reins and allowed the dragon mount to lower its speed as I called out to the teary-eyed Ariane.

“Ariane-dono it’s unusual to hear you scream……, are you bad with rides?”

“……I-I’m just not used to it! You’ve seen the place where I grew up, so shouldn’t you understand!?”

Ariane breathing was erratic and her lilac cheeks were flushed as she glared at me.

Her words along with remembering the scenery that surrounded the village made it click in my head.

It was near impossible to traverse the Great Canada Forest on horseback. I don’t remember coming across a single mount when I stayed in the village.

It seems that she wasn’t accustomed to riding mounts at all.

“A-Alright, how about you don’t increase the speed until I get used to it……?”

A mischievous urge budded inside me when I heard Ariane’s hollow plea.

“Hmm, it’s such a rarity to hear Ariana scream like a maiden and I’d like to enjoy it a bit more…….”

I received seven blows to my back from her as she silently blushed behind me.

Since there wasn’t any help for it, I allowed the dragon mount to continue at a relatively slow speed and used Dimensional Step to increase our pace.

However, it was hard to call this solution effective.

Every time we transferred the dragon mount would become disoriented, freeze up for a moment, and look around before it started moving again.

The dragon mount’s earlier car speed was actually preferable to this start-stop moment we had now.

Even if I used Dimensional Step to cover the entirety of today's trip, we'd only cover about six or seven kilometers at most.

That was assuming that this world had the same diameter as Earth.

As we advanced through the wide, open plain the landscape started to bleed into itself as the sun gradually set in the direction we headed.

The clear blue sky was gradually dyed the shade of crimson and a shadow appeared on the far-off horizon as twilight approached.

I had to block the setting sun with my hand as the day drew to a close.

"We're gonna need to find a campsite soon....."

"Let's set up camp near that wooded area."

Chiome pointed out a small patch of trees as she voiced her opinion on what to do.

I followed her suggestion and guided the dragon mount towards the area where we could have a light meal before we slept.

An oppressive feeling overtook our camp as darkness fell, and the fact that we set up camp in such a wide open area conversely increased my unease over the situation.

Being in such an area was unnerving for me, someone who spent the majority of his life in closed-off environments.

Ariane usually spent her time surrounded by a densely populated forest, and as a result she was also restlessly looking around.

Chiome, on the other hand, was accustomed to camping in such areas and proceeded with an experienced ease.

I could see Chiome's lips form a small smile as she watched Ponta running around and around in circles.

For thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl, to show such poise in the middle of this

plains, made me question just how much of a sheltered life I had lived.

If I was in my flesh and blood form, I doubted I would have been able to last a single night in this place.

I could only manage because my emotions were diluted in my skeleton form. Even so, it would be detrimental to rely on this form forever.

Our first night in the plains passed by with Chiome carrying out her work and Ponta playing about as I thought over my no-win situation.

The next morning, I conducted my routine training with Ariane.

We lacked the wooden swords we normally used, so we made due with some branches and mainly focused on footwork.

Both Chiome and Ariane stressed the importance of how essential repetition was in conditioning one's body for combat.

In order to properly utilize my strength and speed, I had to become accustomed to this body. However, even with Ariane helping me with my training, Glenys was still far beyond me.

Once training was over, we had a light breakfast before setting off again.

As this day came to an end, a mountain range appeared in the southern direction.

The coat of snow that covered the top of a few mountain peaks indicated just how tall they were. However, looking in the opposite direction revealed that the mountain range didn't cross into the plains.

"These would be the Kinrei Mountains the stable owner mentioned. If I'm not mistaken, the Sheila river flows from those mountains so we should be nearing the Kuwana plains."

"That's right. We should be crossing into the tiger tribe's territory soon....."

Chiome looked towards the mountain and seemed to agree with my comment.

As we come towards the edge of the mountain range, another large plain

appeared in the distance.

In front of us was the figurative gateway into the tiger tribe's home, but I eyes were dragged to the forest that ran parallel to the Kinrei Mountains

Something there managed to hold grab hold of my full attention.

“.....What is that?”

In the center of the forest stood a single tree..... a tree that towered over all of those that surrounded it.

There was quite a bit of distance between here and the forest, so I couldn't get an accurate scale of the tree's size, but it reminded me of the Dragon King's Tree.

Is this what it's like to see Tokyo Tower from a distance?

However, the Dragon King's Tree didn't have such a canopy, and this tree gave off a slightly lanky impression.

But, that wasn't the issue.

The huge Tokyo-Tower-sized tree was actually moving in the southern direction.

Each time the huge tree moved, a cloud of black figures would fly out of the nearby trees. In all likelihood, it was some type of monster.

“.....Could that be a treant?!”

Ariane let out a surprised shout when she looked back and saw the creature moving about.

“A treant?”

“Treant's are considered a form of monster.....”

When I questioned Ariane about what she said, it was Chiome that answered me as her blue eyes tracked the enormous walking tree.

Ariane continued the explanation when Chiome went silent.

“.....Many humans consider them all to be monsters, but there are various types of Treants. The name is a general term that refers to any tree that is inhabited by a spirit, only corrupted ones actually possess magic stones. However, that is the largest Treant I’ve ever seen.”

As we watched the Treant slowly and steadily walk in the southern direction, Ariane let out an amazed sigh.

“Isn’t that forest connected to the ‘Black Forest’ in the south?”

“I don’t understand, but some Treant’s can be rather violent, so it’s best that we don’t approach it recklessly.”

I listened to her speak and continued to stare at the walking Treant.

The creature’s sheer size alone made it a dangerous to approach it. If you found yourself in its path you’d be trampled instantly.

“For now, it’s better that we don’t tread in the forests that are off-limit.....”

No creature with the desire to live would ever intentionally approach such a creature.

“Should we look around the Sheila river, near the northern edge of the mountain, to set up camp?”

Taking her eyes away from the tree monster, Chiome’s cat ears began to twitch about as she started to looking for a place to set up camp for the night.

When I questioned Ariane about it with a look she nodded her head in agreement.

Tomorrow we would enter the Kuwana plains.

Chapter 12: The Tiger Tribe

Early the next morning.

We crossed the Sheila River and entered the Kuwana plains.

Normally, in order to cross the massive Sheila River, you would need to follow the river downstream until the river narrowed, but I just used Dimensional Stepto get us across.

The Kuwana plain were the home of the tiger tribe, but it wasn't all that different from the Shingarika plain we just crossed over from.

Just beyond the river, Ariane pointed out something in the northwestern direction..... four conical mountains spaced at equal intervals from each other, indicating that there was more to this landscape than I thought.

The journey after that went smoothly while I occasionally glanced at the four mountains.

We haven't encountered any of the carnivores we had been warned about, and therefore the ride through the plain was slightly boring.

In front of me, Chiome's cat ears fidgeted about as she scanned the area for anything out of the ordinary.

Behind me, Ariane had become accustomed to the dragon mount's normal speed and was calmly keeping an eye on the scenery.

Occasionally, Ariane would say My butt is hurting and we'd stop to take a break, without any of us having much to say.

Our relaxing journey came to an end when Ponta stuck her tail into the air and started crying.

"Kyun!"

Ariane was the first to respond to Ponta's cry and worried us of an incoming

threat.

“Someone’s approaching from our right.”

On the right, I caught sight of two shadows kicking up dust clouds as they closed in on us. They were closing in with considerable speed.

There was a hint of worry in Chiome’s blue eyes as she looked back at our pursuers.

It was obvious that they would catch up with us soon.

I tighten my hold on the reins and lowered our speed as I tried to get a better look at them. It was Ariane that managed to identify them first.

“They’re riding the same kind of mount we are..... could they be from the tiger tribe?”

I pulled the reins and stopped the dragon mount as the two shadows neared.

They were still too far away for me to confirm anything yet, but I wondered if we would be able to interact with the tiger tribe on good terms.

I was filled to the brim with anticipation at first, but that changed as I felt aggression coming from the other party.

Noticing our behavior, our pursuers lowered their speed and began to observe us.

They were tiger tribesmen, just like Ariane had said.

The two tiger tribesmen held decorative spears in their hands

I couldn’t estimate their exact size, but since they were a head taller than me they were probably around two and a half meters tall.

They wouldn’t lose to Goemon in terms of muscularity and their gold and black striped hair, certainly resembled the fur of a tiger.

While their toned upper bodies were exposed, they wore arm and leg guards.

If there were any differences between the cat-eared people, it would be the

physical disparity between them.

Leaving aside exceptions like Goemon, the majority of the cat-eared people I've met, be it man or woman, had thin flexible bodies.

If these two were standard for the tiger tribe, then Goemon's size would be the norm for the tribe.

Their ears were more rounded than regular cat-eared people and combined with their wild, shoulder-length hair they truly gave them the atmosphere of beastmen.

The dragon mounts the two of them rode stopped five meters away from us.

One of the tiger tribesmen raised his spear as he began to shout.

"Where did you acquire that mount? The design of that saddle belongs to one of the six clans living here, it's the property of the Ena clan! Your lives depend on your answer!!"

Ariane, Chiome, and I shared a look after we received that threat.

The saddle we'd received to ride the dragon mount seemed to act as an identifier within the tiger tribe.

Their cautiousness was probably because they believed we had obtained our mount through underhanded means.

I raised my hands in front of them in a non-threatening manner and explained our circumstances to them.

"We're from an elven village on the Northern Continent. We came here to meet with the tiger tribe. We have no ill will towards you. This dragon mount was obtained from a stable owner in a town called Fernandez, just east of here. We only seek to return it to its owners."

When I stopped speaking I observed the two tiger tribesmen to see how they'd react.

The warriors looked at us with suspicion and exchanged a few hushed words

between themselves.

“We are members of Uiria clan! What business do you have with us!?”

The man rose his spear at us again and shouted another question at us as his companion watched.

Since we had nothing to hide I decided to answer him.

“The merchants in Fernandez say you posses devil nails. I was wondering if you provide me with some of them. Is there any way to negotiate?”

The two of them became more skeptical when they heard my answer.

The tension began to rise as I realized how weak the pursuit of peppers might have seemed. It sounded like a poor excuse made up on the spot.

As I tried to come up with a better way to explain ourselves, Chiome reacted to something and turned her head in a certain direction.

“?” “What?”

When the two tiger tribesmen also reacted I looked behind me to see what was happening.

Everything seemed the same as before until I noticed a dust cloud gradually approaching us. This time it was only one tiger tribesman approaching us.

This man had a panicked expression as he raised his spear and made a call to action.

“Two giants have appeared near the village! All patrol teams must return to fight immediately!!”

“Huh!?” “Fuck!!”

Once the man finished delivering his message, he grabbed hold of his reins and vigorously headed off in another direction.

The two tiger tribesmen glanced at us, sighed in defeat and prepared to chase after the messenger.

“You some kind of warrior aren’t you!? If you want to meet our leader, follow us!!”

Saying only that in a booming voice, the two cracked the reins of their mounts and ran off.

Ariane’s head peeked over my shoulder and stared at their backs with dull surprise.

“What will we do, Arc? Based on the flow of the conversation, they want our help with a troublesome situation.”

I looked down at Chiome as I thought over her question. She looked away from the tiger tribesmen and nodded towards Ariane and me.

Seems like my answer would determine our course of action.

“We’ve come this far, I say we follow them.”

I maneuvered the dragon mount in the direction of the tiger tribesmen and gave it the command to run.

According to the messenger, a pair of giants had shown up near the village, so just what kind of creatures were they?

I tried to imagine what the tiger tribe, which differed from humans, would classify as giants, but it could be inferred that these giants were a considerable threat.

The figure of the treant we saw from a distance yesterday crossed my mind, but I shook my head and focused on what was ahead of use.

If it was a giant of that scale I doubted even my abilities would be enough. It would be a sick punchline if the those trying to drive something out were destroyed instantaneously.

“I feel like we’re stepping into another troublesome situation again.”

While I tried to calculate the risks and rewards I caught a bit of Ariane’s complaint.

“Well, let’s think about it. This works in our favor, since negotiations will be easier if we help them.”

I think I heard an exasperated sigh after I said that.

Ponta took a fighting posture on top of my head and vigorously shook her tail.

Her behavior was proof enough that we weren’t in any danger just yet.

Chapter 13: Fighting Giants

The landscape flew by at a such a rate that it was hard to tell how long we'd been following the two dragon mounts in front of us.

Unfortunately, I didn't have something like a watch on me, but no more than thirty minutes had probably passed. Despite moving at such a high speed, there was still a gap between us and the other dragon mount.

Before long, some sort of village appeared ahead of the two tiger tribesmen's mount.

We were still a good distance away, but everything seemed fine until the ground started to rumble as if the Mongol hoard was closing in.

Two silhouettes came over a small hill in the village's vicinity. There were six tiger tribesmen, hailed for their fighting prowess, holding those creatures back.

"Are those the giants.....?"

Ariane peaked her head up to at my question and took a look in front of us.

Despite the noise the charging dragon mount generated, I could still hear her breathing.

"Kyun! Kyun!"

Ponta barked in the giants' general direction before she hurriedly coiled herself around my neck.

The giants the tiger tribesmen were fighting were slightly different from what I imagined.

First of all, they didn't have any heads. Apart from the lack of a head, they did resemble humans like one would expect them to.

No, though I haven't seen the animal in this world, a more accurate description would be a headless gorilla.

They stood six meters tall and their bodies were covered in black fur. Their thick, long arms held stone axes and they managed to carve out swaths of land with each swing.

In lieu of a head, these giants had a weird face sticking out of their chest.

They had no noses and their eyes were completely dilated. Their huge mouths were filled with yellow teeth and overall, they reminded me of a monster from a sci-fi show.

“They look like Ewaipanomas.....”

Contrary to my careless remark, the battle between the tiger tribesmen and the black giants was a violent struggle.

It wasn't possible for the tiger tribe to walk away from of this battle unscathed.

When a giant grappled one of tribesmen, their life was squeezed out of them. With that much damage, even using resurrection magic would be a wasted effort.

Besides, on the outskirts of the battlefield, I could see those who were too injured to move.

When they caught sight of their allies' plight, the two riders in front of us increased their speed and charged at the giants.

As they approached the giants at breakneck speeds, a threatening wail rose from their mouths.

The two riders were in a headlong charge, and one of the giants' delayed reactions left the side of its leg exposed. Two sets of dragon mount horns simultaneously collided with said leg.

However, I heard a dull thwack and saw that the dragon mount's horns had broken off, the collision sending it flying.

The horns of a dragon mount didn't give me the impression of fragile objects.

In other words, the defensive strength of these black giants was considerably high.

“.....! This is going to be a troublesome opponent.”

Chiome leaned forward in the saddle as she commented on the state of the battle.

Charging headlong would be an ineffective strategy. Though it would be helpful if we could topple these creatures, they didn't even budge from the previous impact.

“Large-scale magic will be disadvantageous in this situation, we should stop their movement first.”

I pulled on our dragon mount's reins to bring us to a stop before drawing the Sword of Holy Thunder and Teutates' Holy Shield, and leaping out of the saddle.

With sword and shield in hand, I ran at the black giants.

Ariane and Chiome readied their weapons and followed after me.

“First off! Shield of Holy Light!”

With a shout, I invoked one of my Holy Knight skills.

Light spread from the center of my shield and covered my entire body.

I've never used defensive skills in this world before, but it was a bit of insurance even if I didn't know how effective it would be.

I passed the fallen tiger tribesmen while being wrapped in light and impeded the advance of the black giants.

“Now for the warm up! Holy Light Sword Slash!”

I raised the Sword of Holy Thunder towards the heavens before unleashing another skill with a heavy slash.

A dazzling light flew from the blade's edge and cleaved through the ground like a razor as it flew towards one of the giant's legs.

A sonic boom accompanied the impact as fresh blood sprayed into the air.

Avuagiyaoaiiau!!

An almost human scream was spat from the giant's gaping chest mouth..... despite the scream itself being loud enough to shake the hill we stood on.

While the blood splash was a sign of damage being inflicted, there was only a slight wound on the giant's black, hairy leg.

That's not to say that the attack did nothing.

The giant rushed to protect its now injured leg.

The eyes of the fighting tiger tribesmen looked in my direction for a moment with sheer amazement in their expressions. It was only natural to be surprised by a silver knight suddenly entering the battle.

"I'm here to offer my support!!"

I spoke in a booming voice so everyone could hear me before cutting into the giant's leg directly. There was a good response as the sound of cracking bone rang out and more blood sprayed.

My sword was able to cut halfway into the giant's leg. However, the amount of power I put into that swing wasn't enough to put the beast down.

Aoahuhhhhhhhhhhhh ooooi!!

The giant's chest face distorted in agony as it raised the leg I'd just cut into in a last ditch effort to protect itself.

One of the tiger tribesmen took the opportunity to slam his large club down on the toes of the giant's other foot.

"Ohh!"

Though I only caught the impact in the corner of my eye, I still groaned as the image of stubbing my toes came to mind.

After another roaring scream, the giant's six-meter tall figure began to stagger.

Just a bit more was needed to topple the giant..... it was at that moment

Chiome used the giant's body as a stepping stone.

Two orbs of water were already forming in her hands.

Water Style: Water Spear!!

The orbs in her hands stretched into the shape of two spears, which she proceeded to throw like arrows.

The spears entered the giant's gaping mouth and launched themselves into its throat.

The giant was no longer capable of screaming as it fell to the ground with a thud, right in front of Ariane. The flames that ran the length of her sword's blade and surrounded her snow-white hair were hot enough to distort the atmosphere.

Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes

In response to her chant, the flames that clung to her sword became even more intense.

After running up the giant's abdomen Ariane raised her flaming sword and thrust it into one of the giant's eyes.

For a moment, it bounced up like a broken spring as its arms and legs violently jerked about but the smell of burnt meat and smoke soon drifted from its mouth.

Seemed like we managed to kill one of them.

However, just as Ariane pulled her sword from the giant's corpse, the stone ax of the other giant came down on her.

An earsplitting sonic boom rang out as I raised my shield and took a knee to fend off the blow.



When I looked beneath I saw Ariane looking up at me in disbelief.

“Are you alright, Ariane-dono?”

She gave me a slight nod after I asked about her safety.

I let out a relieved sigh before I glanced back at the black giant.

It's large body had managed to weather that last collision. Despite using both hands to hold the shield and having a defensive skill active, my hands felt a little numb.

Remembering the sensation of the taking a hit from the giant's stone ax, I quickly fell back.

The giant, seemingly disoriented, tried to retreat as well only for chiome to throw a water dagger at its face.

One of the tiger tribesmen warriors with a large club over his shoulder started shouting orders.

“You lot!! We are the hunters of these plains, we will not fall behind these outsiders!!”

He seemed to be the same one who had smashed the giant's toe from before.

The men responded with a thunderous cry as their leader ran at the black giant and crushed its foot with his metallic club.

The giant let out a scream that the surrounding tiger tribesmen used as a signal to attack. They numbered around thirty people.

The warriors of the tiger tribe aimed at the giant's legs like we had done, and attacking the creature's vital points once they toppled it.

After a few minutes, two giant corpses laid on this small hillside.

While the tiger tribesmen raised a victory cry, the man that rallied warriors a while ago called out to me.

“Let me express my gratitude for the rescue back there. You're from the east and

an elf?”

Realizing where this was heading, I grabbed the canteen from my waist as Ariane stepped forward to greet the tiger tribes representative.

A simple shrug from me was all it took for her to understand what I was trying to do.

“I’m Ariane Glenys Maple. I’m from the Great Canada Forest on the Northern Continent. The one beside me likewise hails from the Northern Continent’s Blade Heart Clan.....”

I drank the hot spring water through a straw while Ariane acted as our group’s representative. If I didn’t refill the water soon it would become troublesome in a number of ways.

I took off my helmet and stepped beside Ariane as I had that thought.

“..... This person is an elf like me.”

“My name is Arc Raratoia. I am the newest member of our village, please take care of me.”

“Kyun!”

Just as I finished my introduction, Ponta uncoiled herself and cried out.

“.....and this is my travel companion Ponta.”

“Kyun!”

The tiger tribe’s representative nodded once our introductions were over before hoisting his club over his shoulder and introducing himself.

“I am the leader of Uiria clan, one of the six clans that live on these plains. My name is Ein Uiria. I would like nothing more than to provide you with a proper welcome, but we need to bring the injured back to the village. Please wait a bit while we prepare something suitable for your arrival.”

I replied to Ein with a nod and put my helmet on again. For the sake of smoother

negotiations, I took him up on his offer. An act of charity will be a good investment here.

“Ein-dono. I know a few healing techniques and can help treat the injured if you like.”

Ein looked at me in surprise when he heard my statement.

“I’m sorry to ask, but you’re a witch doctor as well? I will return to the village at once and send two women here. Use them as you see fit.”

Ein quickly turned towards the village and headed off with a smile on his face. As we watched his back shrink in the distance Ariane looked up at me and asked me a question.

“Aren’t you being a bit hasty? I figured you’d at least charge them...”

“Hmhmhm, my purpose was to meet the tiger tribe. Plus, if I show them kindness now the negotiations for the devil nails will go smoother later.”

Ariane shrugged her shoulders and shook her head at my reply.

“You don’t seem attached to gold, but you’re so persistent in the pursuit of food.”

“Isn’t it better to search for delicious food like the elves do, rather than collecting gold coins?”

A complicated expression appeared on Ariane’s face when she heard my reply.

“I need to listen to your definition of ‘elves’ at least once.....”

When I turned around to begin treating the injured while enjoying Ariane slight confusion, I heard her timidly calling out to me.

“.....A-Arc, thank you for your help just now.”

Her cheeks were slightly flushed and she was unintentionally avoiding eye contact with me.

Just now... oh, she was probably talking about how I blocked the black giant’s

attack with my shield.

“Oh..... Huh?”

I tried to look her in eye while I stroked my chin, but Ariane stubbornly refused to make eye contact. I unknowingly began to circle her as I tried to understand this new reaction.

When I felt a lukewarm glaze on my back, I turned to find Chiome staring at us without saying a word.

“..... Umm, I’ll proceed with the treatment then.”

Unable to withstand the pressure of her silent glare, I hastily left the situation.

*Translator/Editor-Note:

We decided to make a change in this chapter, and since we try to be as faithful as possible to the original work (as long as that makes sense^^) we thought we should mention this.

While Arc refers to the giants as “Ewaipanoma” in the translation, the japanese Arc uses is “”, which translates as “giant”. Since it would be a bit odd to have Arc describe giants as giants, Silver found this alternative term. After using Google’s image search, it appears that Ewaipanoma look the most like the giants Arc describes.

Maybe one of our readers knows more about mythological creatures and japanese than we do, and if you do, please leave a comment!

Chapter 14: Unrest

Once the aftermath of the black giants' attack had been wrapped up, we were invited to the clan head's home.

The village itself wasn't that large, and after looking around I would guess that only about one hundred members of the tiger tribe lived her.

At a distance, it seemed as if the tiger tribe used houses that were similar to the Mongolian yurt.

The cylindrical outer wall was covered with a thick white cloth and there were no windows, but there was a crystal, like those used in elven Light Emitting Crystal Lamps, that illuminated the place. The walls were decorated with bone and fang accessories and multiple embroidered carpets were spread along the ground.

The height of the entrance was made to accommodate the taller than average tiger tribesmen, so it wasn't a tight fit like regular doors.

Additionally, the high ceiling created a spacious area which gave the house the feeling of a hotel lobby.

At this moment however, the chief's home felt rather small.

Ein, as the clan head, sat center stage in front of me while the other tiger tribe warriors flanked his sides.

All of these muscular men of Goemon's size, gathered in this one area, created a somewhat ferocious image. Muscles were probably a point of pride here.

As such worthless thoughts passed through my mind, Ein immediately started the conversation once the formal greetings had ended.

".....For the previous occurrence, we offer our thanks to you, Arc. Ariane-dono, he is a fine subordinate."

When Ein chuckled after he spoke, Ariane, who was uncharacteristically

nervous, explained our situation.

For some reason, he seemed to have pegged me for Ariane's subordinate. Probably because Ariane acted as our representative in our first interaction.

".....So, you all are on a journey. Sorry for the disrespect, Arc-dono. Allow me to express my honest gratitude once more."

Ein slightly lowered his head and redirected his gratitude towards me.

However, in reaction to the clan head's behavior, the atmosphere surrounding us was stirred up a little when bitter looks appeared on the faces of the surrounding warriors.

As I was wondering about this strange situation, a large woman appeared from behind Ein's seat and started to scold the warriors.

"Are you lot ungrateful for the help you received!? Are you gonna forget that your injuries were healed and complain, simply because they didn't adhere to our hierarchy?! Those unwilling to acknowledge the kindness they received, step forward so I can personally rebreak your arms!!"

As the woman spoke in a bold manner the clan head crossed his arms and glared at the warriors.

Apparently, my actions were the root of this stiff atmosphere.

As for the woman who spoke up, she was two meters and thirty centimeters tall.

She had a slim body when compared to the muscular men that surrounded her, but I realized it was just an optical illusion when I looked towards Ariane and Chiome besides me.

Her sun-tanned skin and her extremely large breasts were accentuated by her large frame, and because she had crossed her arms beneath them. She also had an abundant amount of golden and black hair carefully done up atop her head.

The warriors simultaneously bowed their heads when she had finished scolding them.

“I’m sorry for all the commotion, this is my wife Yuga.”

Ein resumed speaking with a shrug and a bit of a chuckle as the woman named Yuga looked towards me.

“I’m Yuga Ein. Sorry for this poor showing, honored guest. As these are our clan’s warriors, they feel ashamed for having to borrow the strength of outsiders. Because the giants had damaged the neighboring sub-tribes, the injured had been brought here, but we were reaching our limits. On behalf of these fools, I thank you.”

Yuga flaunted a daring smile as she thanked me.

After those involved with battle had been treated, Ein led us to one of the houses filled to the brim with injured people.

Having no reason to refuse his request, I proceeded to cast recovery magic on them, all the while questioning why they were mostly women and children.

They must be the survivors on the giants’ assault..... I guess.

“No, I came here to find the members of the tiger tribe in the first place. So long as my request is fulfilled, there’s no need to thank me.”

I nodded at their thanks and give my reply.

Ein slapped his knees and offered me a fearless smile when he heard that.

“That reminds me, I haven’t heard your purpose here. You’ve traversed the frontier to get here, so what could you possibly desire?”

In response to his question, the men that Yuga had silenced began to stir and discuss something amongst themselves while looking at me.

Because I wasn’t charging for the treatment I provided, I decided to bring up my request.

When the warriors that led us here spoke up, Ein and his wife’s eyes bulged after learning of my intentions.

I heard Ariane sigh beside me and caught sight of Ponta playing with Chiome's finger-tips.

"Arc-dono, you ventured into the frontier to acquire 'devil nails'. Furthermore, you even subdued a dragon mount to cross the plains."

Ein began to laugh after hearing our purpose for find the tiger tribe, before lowering his head and apologizing.

"Sorry, Arc-dono. My clan doesn't hoard many devil nails. They're grown a little to west of here by one of the larger clans. Since the Uiria are not well liked, you'll need to negotiate with them for what you desire."

As he spoke, Ein scratched his chin and let out a grand sigh when he was finished.

This village didn't seem to cultivate devil nails for themselves. Because the peppers were grown by a western tribe, I asked for a guide or directions at the very least.

"I don't suppose you could provide us guidance to a village that is cultivating devil nails?"

At me question, the clan head's eyes began to shine like a carnivore's eyes.

"The giants we fought are residents of the black forest south of these plains. Normally, they rarely venture into the plains, but lately they've been appearing more and more often. A warning was sent out by a western clan, but I never imagined they'd come so far east into Kuwana. Therefore, I plan to lead a party of warriors into the Ena clan's territory to investigate."

I could guess where Ein was heading with this. If I wasn't mistaken, the saddle we owned belonged to the Ena clan.

"Would you like us to join you? If it's one or two giants, we would be enough to deal with them, and wouldn't our presence infuriate the others?"

Ein nodded and smiled when he heard my reasoning.

"That's right!? But I'm not finished! Ours is the smallest of the six clans, so I

have to leave warriors behind in case another giant appears near the village again.”

In other words, he couldn't afford to take that many people with him into the Ena clan's territory while the scouting group would be killed if their numbers weren't sufficient..... that's why he wanted to supplement his low numbers with us.

Simply put, we would be mercenaries.

Hmm, I wonder why I was feeling a bit nostalgic about this.

When I looked towards Ariane and Chiome to gauge their responses, Chiome nodded silently and I understood Ariane's answer with a look.

So..... our decision was made.

We borrowed one of the Uiria clan's tents and spent the night in the village to prepare for the journey. The next day, we'd set out for the Ena clan's main village.

Apart from Ein and our group, ten warriors would be making this trip.

Even though the tiger tribe excelled in fighting prowess, they would suffer heavy losses if they didn't unite against the giants, and this was all the village could afford to send.

However, even though we knew how to subjugate the giants it didn't mean that our next encounter with them would be as one-sided as the previous one.

Whether or not we could safely reach the Ena clan's village..... that worry occupied my mind as I looked towards my companions.

Ariane was polishing the Sword of the Lion King as she thought something over.

Chiome was expressionlessly stuffing her mouth with the spiced, cookie-like food we'd been served at dinner.

Ponta had finished her meal and was dozing off on my lap.

Everything was the same as normal..... as if they could face anything without issue.

Chapter 15: The Ena Clan

The sky was still dark when our group prepared to set off for the Ena clan's village in the northwest.

With everyone riding dragon mounts, we reached the village in about two days.

Just as Ein had predicted, around the morning of the second day the yurts of the Ena clan became visible.

He also mentioned that the Ena clan's village should house over four hundred people, which earned it the designation of the largest clan.

While it didn't seem like much, it was difficult for any society to thrive on plains where giants and various monsters roamed, whether they had high battle prowess or not.

The tiger tribe seemed to be a nomadic people that kept livestock near their homes. Said animals were covered in thick white wool and horns that made them look like goats rather than sheep.

They referred to these animal as 'white goats'.

Their wool was actually a valuable raw material for textile weaving. The wool was normally sold in Fabuna'ha, but the recent giant attacks put the trade on hold.

It was Ein who told us this while we traveled to the Ena clan's village.

Despite Ein being well known as the leader of the Uiria, it seems he was capable of traveling between villages without much issue.

Because someone in full body armor and a dark elf were rarities within the village, many had come from the surrounding tents to gawk at us.

However, when I looked into the eyes of the onlookers..... I only found worry and nervousness on their faces.

After making our way to the center of the village, Ein lept off his dragon mount and started to speak with the man who had stepped forward to greet us.

“Hou, it’s been a while! What brings the Ena clan’s head here personally?”

“.....I received a report from our scouts. That Uiria’s clan leader was bringing outsiders into our territory.”

Ein exchanged greetings with the large tiger tribesmen that came to meet us. Apparently, this man was the head of this village.

While Ein and this man conversed with one another, the man was sizing up the outsiders that had shown up in his village.

Hou was possessed a large build even among the tiger tribesmen. He stood a full head above Ein. Probably just a little under three meters tall.

The countless scars covering his well-toned, muscular body indicated that he was a veteran warrior.

Over the course of the conversation, he remained outwardly vigilant of us outsiders.

Noticing the tension in the air, Ein made the conscious decision to cut to the chase about our visit to Hou’s village.

“Two giants appeared near my village the other day.”

Hou raised an eyebrow when he heard that and offered a serious nod.

“.....I see, so they’ve finally appeared that far east..... So, what’s the damage?”

Hou shifted his gaze to the warriors behind Ein, as he started to grasp the circumstances that would lead another clan leader to his village, and asked the damage suffered during the battle with the giants.

Ein proceeded to recollect the entire battle with the giants and explained that the outsiders he brought along happened to come along and lend a hand.

Hou's face became like those of the Uiria warriors when they first had been gathered before us, as he listened.

"It's fortunate that you could use a witchdoctor's power afterward, but to rely on outsiders during the battle....."

Hou was obviously disappointed by that fact but Ein brushed off the matter with a hearty chuckle and a smile.

"My people reacted the same way until my wife was through with them."

Hou's body twitched when he heard that and he averted his gaze from Ein.

".....I-I see. Then forget what I just said..... please."

Hou's overwhelming coercion had ceased when Ein brought up his wife. Hou even went so far as to whisper a plea in Ein's ear.

Looks like Yuga and the two clan leaders had a very close relationship with each other.

Hou cleared his throat before looking at us with an earnest expression.

".....It's good that you came. The other clan leaders will be gathering soon to deal with the giants. They have already destroyed a number of villages. I'm holding a discussion concerning subjugation tactics with the others now."

Ein sighed when he heard what Hou said.

"Hmm..... the giant's have already reached this place, as I thought....."

I spoke my comment Hou, who'd been looking towards us off and on, opened his mouth.

"By the way, that dragon mouth your guests are riding, where did they obtain it?"

Hou's eyes took on a dangerous glow as he spoke, so I told him the same story I told Ein the other day.

".....Two people on patrol never returned, and that mount belonged to one of

them.”

After Hou lowered his head and groaned, he returned his gaze to me.

“Arc-dono, dragon mounts are treasured by our warriors. Do you intend to return that treasure to our family?”

Hou stared straight at me as he waited for my reply, so I held up my index finger in front of him.

“I will happily return this mount..... but there is one thing I would like to ask you as the leader of the Ena clan.”

Power returned to Hou’s body in reaction to my statement.

“This is interesting. What do you request from me, the leader of the Ena clan?”

Hou floated a large smile as I was about to voice my condition, but before I could say anything a sudden noise drawn everyone’s attention towards the village’s entrance.

When I looked, I saw a heavily injured dragon mount running hurriedly through the village.

Seeing this as well, Hou’s eyes bulged before he started shouting instructions.

“Women and children make way!! Men hold it down!!”

Answering their leader’s call, warriors rushed from nearby houses and began chasing the meandering dragon mount.

However, it was a wasted effort as the dragon mount collapsed on the spot and threw the young tiger tribesmen it had been carrying on the ground.

The crowd that gathered parted ways when Hou came forward to assess the situation.

As outsiders, Ariane Chiome and I intended to watch the events from far away, but Ponta used her magic and circled the gathering crowd once before flying back to us.

“Kyu, Kyukyun!

When she landed on my head she tried to report what was going on, but I couldn't understand what she was saying.

Then I heard Hou's shout from within the crowd of people.

“Somebody! Get witch doctor Baa!!”

A few men broke away from the crowd and ran deeper into the village.

If I wasn't mistaken, witchdoctors were the magical healers within the tiger tribe.

Unable to sit back, I forced my way through the crowd of tiger tribesmen and stepped before Hou as he cradled the young man's body.

The young man's breathing was rough and his left arm had been crushed and covered in blood.

Ein gave me a sideways look before nodding his head.

I nodded back before invoking my magic without accepting a refusal.

“Pardon me. Major Heal.”

Ambient light filled the area and started to gather around the young man's left arm, shifting flesh and bones back into their proper place.

As the light slowly faded, the everyone around us who managed to see what happened exclaimed amazement when the serious injuries disappeared like a bad dream in the morning.

Hou's eyes bulged as he looked back and forth between me and the young man's arm. After the young man opened his eyes Hou, started to frantically ask what happened.

“What did you find? What happened!? Can you remember anything!?”

Recognizing his leader's voice, the young man tried to stand up only for his eyes to start swimming.

“Gah!?”

He immediately lost all his energy and fell down.

“Even if I heal the injury, I can’t replace the blood that was lost. He needs to rest and regain his strength.”

Hou nodded before signaling two men to carry the young man into a nearby house.

However, the young man clung to Hou and his voice shook as he spoke.

“Giants appeared near my village. Thirty of them, maybe more.....”

Hou’s round ears started to droop as he listened to the young man weakly voicing his report.

As soon as the young man lost consciousness, the arm with which he had held onto Hou fell down as the two men carried him off.

Hou’s eyes started to fill with rage and veins started to appear on his forehead, giving him the appearance of an ogre.

“Contact the remaining clan leaders!! Apart from those defending the village, all warriors prepare to hunt!!”

A deafening war cry followed the moment of silence after the order had been given.

All the children rushed into their homes and the brought out armor for the men. The men proceeded to polish their equipment and prepare for the hunt.

While everyone was busy with their preparations, Hou approached me.

“Honored guest, we didn’t get to finish our conversation, but.....”

He cut off the conversation with a shake of his head and looked back at his people.

I had no idea what Hou was trying to say. Perhaps we’ll talk once the giants had been subjugated.

Anyhow, requesting help from outsiders wasn't highly looked upon within the tribe.

If things didn't go well, it would be the tiger tribesmen that ran the risk of being wiped out by the giants instead of the other way around.

Now was not the time to talk about devil nails.

In addition, the young man said that there had been at least thirty giants.

The tiger tribesmen prided themselves on their combat prowess, but even they had problems dealing with two giants, let alone thirty. Even if every warrior here were to participate, there was no way they'd avoid heavy casualties.

I could probably deal with them myself, in their place.....

There was only one thing to say here.

Isn't there an old saying that "Ask and you shall receive."

"May I participate in this hunt?"

If I wanted the devil nails, I needed to ensure their victory.

Hou stared directly at me when he heard my question.

After a quick exchange of glances, Hou floated a threatening smile.

"Accept this promise from Hou, the leader of the Ena clan! You shall be repaid in kind once this hunt is over!"

After saying that, Hou returned to his own preparations.

Having watched that entire exchange, Ariane let out a grand sigh before thrusting her finger at me.

"I'm coming along with you! I'll kill them more efficiently this time!"

With that declaration, Ariane pouted and looked towards the horizon.

Her slip-up during our first encounter with the giants must have still been

bothering her.

She probably intended to redeem herself in the upcoming battle. With that thought in mind, I looked toward Chiome, who simply shut her eyes and gave me a brief reply.

“Me too.”

After that conversation, I began to wonder just how blood-thirsty my group was.

Since there was no blood flowing through my skeletal body, my own blood didn't race at the prospect of the coming battle, or at least that's what I believed.

Chapter 16: The Giants Attack

Preparations were completed rather quickly and the warriors were gathered in the center of the village in less than an hour.

The other clan leaders that had been visiting the village were accompanied by their own attendants, just like Ein, and those warriors had been added to this “Great Hunt”.

There were a hundred and fifty warriors total.

Almost everyone rode a dragon mount as we headed towards the village attacked by the giants, the resulting charge making the earth shake in our wake.

Since I had no idea where we were going, I just followed at the rear of the crowd.

The horizon laid before us, there were gentle hills and rolling plains all around us.

An hour had passed since we left the village.

Ariane would sometimes complain about her butt hurting and would occasionally stand up as we rode, an action that caused me a great deal of unease even before the battle began.

“Ariane-dono, you do know you could fall off like that, don’t you?”

When I looked back and said that Ariane raised a snow-white eyebrow before she spoke up.

“Arc, why don’t we take a break? My butt is at its limit.....”

Even though the dragon mount’s movements caused a lot of bouncing in Ariane’s chest area, the person herself didn’t seem like she would fall anytime soon.

When I realized where my eyes had wandered off to, I started to groan.

If we were the only ones to stop for a rest, we would be stranded in the middle of nowhere.

We weren't in a situation where I could casually say "let's take a short break."

Those around us were driven by the desire to avenge their fallen brethren and were accustomed to long rides, so none of them were worn out like Ariane was.

Chiome, unlike Ariane, showed no sign of discomfort as if she were used to extended riding sessions. Either that or she was so light that she simply wasn't affected as badly.

While I was preoccupied with my debate on what to do, Ponta started to rapidly shake her tail.

"Kyun! Kyun!"

When Ponta started hitting the top of my head and cry, I focused on what was in front of me.

The tiger tribe village sat atop a gentle hill in front of us.

At the same time, a gigantic humanoid figure slowly came into view.

The giant was shoving a crushed corpse, which it had been holding in its hands, into its gaping chest mouth.

"Bastard!!"

The bloodlust of the warriors rose as they watched the gruesome scene take place.

However, the giants finally noticed our loud approach and signaled the others.

Vuwoa!! Gakaawa!!

While it was impossible to understand the black giant, it grabbed hold of its stone hammer and let out a beast-like roar as it started charging towards us.

In response, the some of the other giants that had apparently been gathering inside the village came running with their weapons in hand.

However, including the one we saw first, there were only 5 giants altogether. I could see another five giants inside the village, but it looked like they were too busy looking for something.

The young man had said that at least thirty giants had attacked the village.

The leaders noticed this immediately and started to look around for the missing giants.

There weren't many obstacles in the middle of the plains so there weren't a lot of places you could hide twenty giants.

Hou, the acting leader of this expedition, was aware of this and decided to focus on the enemies in front of him.

He raised his weapon in the air and pointed it at the approaching giants.

The surrounding warriors let out a booming battle cry and brandished their weapon.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

The cry of the tiger tribesmen combined with the rumbling of the dragon mounts to create an intimidating spectacle.

As they ran past the leading giant, the warriors would attack the creature's legs.

The dull sounds of a collision and of breaking bones overlapped with one another as the giant smashed the ground with their weapons.

The warriors that were in range of the attack were blown away while suffering critical injuries. However, I caught sight of one giant falling to the ground, which meant they managed to do significant damage to it.

The warriors swarmed the fallen giant and unleashed a flurry of attacks until it died.

There were enough warriors here to cope with the five giants.

Before the remaining giants can enter the battle, I'll settle this instantaneously

with a magic spell.

When I brought our dragon mount to a stop in order to cast my spell, Ariane sighed and leaped from the saddle.

Once she was out of the saddle she began to frown and massage her butt.

The pain in her backside must've been extensive.

Handing the reins to Chiome, I climbed down and scanned the area.

I intended to use a summon beast like I did against the hydra a while back.

While I could have used an area of effect spell, people could still be alive and hiding in the village.

I'd learned in Leibnitz that a summoned beast automatically attacked the enemy, regardless of the surroundings.

There was no way to tell what would happen if a combat-oriented beast was summoned, but one that acted as support should be fine..... probably.

“Ariane-dono, I'm going to kill the giants close to the village, wait here a minute.”

“What!?”

I told them what I was about to do before taking my summoning stance.

A large glowing magic formation appeared on the ground in front of me as I began to envision the beast I wanted to summon.

What I was trying to summon was a creature I rarely used in the game and I was having trouble remembering it.

“.....It's on the tip of my tongue.....”

If I'm not mistaken, it was a low-level summon with debuff skills.

I kept the magic formation on standby as I searched my memory. However, the only thing that came to my mind were high-level summons as my thoughts

began to wonder.

Ariane called out to me while I was in this state.

“What a second Arc. That the same magic that sends out rampaging giants, isn’t it?”

She must have remembered when my summon collapsed that church and was worried the same thing would happen to the village here.

Just because I tend to forget inconvenient things, it doesn’t mean I’d forget that.

Well, I was struggling with this spell so it might have been better to use a different summon here.

Just as I was about to tell her that, a shadowy figure appeared behind Ariane and rushed towards us with incredible speed.

Ariane noticed the bloodlust the figure was emitting and started to look back, but the figure was faster and it managed to pull a dagger from its sleeve and throw it before she could react, so I pushed her aside.

The next thing I realized, the blade of the dagger managed to slip between one of my helmet’s visor gaps. The surprise attack broke my concentration and caused to summoning formation to vanish.

Ponta would have normally wrapped herself around my neck in a fight, but she had still been atop my helmet when the enemy attacked, so she fled instead.

Ponta created a miniature cyclone with her magic and flew well over my head to escape the surprise attack.

The wind kicked up by the cyclone managed to rustle my assailant’s hood and cloak.

“Nuu!!”

“!!”

Recognizing the opportunity, I prepared to launch a full strength punch at my

assailant as he brandished a sword. However, the enemy noticed this and retreated.

“Arc!!”

Ariane had been surprised when I suddenly pushed her and shouted my name when she saw me pulling the dagger out.

I gestured with my hand to let her know I was alright.

Ariane was momentarily dumbfounded by my gesture, before her lilac cheeks turned a slight shade of red when she remembered the contents of my armor.

She was probably embarrassed because she forgot that.

However, that would have been a fatal blow had I not been in my skeletal form.

My skull's cavities were totally empty, and the assailant immediately noticed my nonexistent reaction to the attack.

By the time I'd clutched my fist he had already started to fall back.

Red eyes peeked out from beneath the enemy's hood as they pulled two more daggers from their sleeves.

“Nuu!!”

“Arc!!”

Ariane grasped the situation instantly but she started frowning when she tried to stand.

It might have been a mistake to push her down. Her backside had already suffered through that riding session.

It would be inconvenient if she couldn't move properly. Out of all of us, Ariane would be in the most danger if her movements were impaired.

Even an amateur like myself could understand that much.

To top it off, I was barehanded in front of an armed opponent.

Leaving my sword and shield attached to the dragon mount while I evoked the summoning spell had backfired on me.

The tiger tribesmen were still fighting a good distance away, and all I could do was realise how careless I'd been.

Metallic sounds repeatedly echoed through the area as the enemy slashed at my armor. While their movements were quick, their attacks had no effect.

Since I was covered in full body armor, the enemy couldn't determine what was beneath it and they were avoiding lethal strikes because of what had happened before.

In other words, it was my prime opportunity to attack.

I put my entire weight behind a straight punch. The air itself vibrated as the enemy dodged my fist by a hair's breadth, but was dragged back by the vacuum effect that followed the punch.

When I tried to capitalize on the opening and deliver the finishing blow, the enemy kicked the air to regain their posture and managed to circle around me.

I didn't expect to fight the straw hat's cook here.

His two blades closed in on my neck like a pair of shears.

Even if I was only a skeleton, there was no way to tell what would happen if my head was cut off. It came down to whether or not the enemy's attack could overcome my bones' durability.

The moment I felt the edge of the enemies daggers on my neck, a I heard the sound of metal colliding behind me as the enemy kicked the air to dodge something.

"Arc-dono, are you alright!?"

Chiome rushed to my side as she spoke.

"Yes, you managed to save me Chiome-dono. Thank you."

Even though my skeleton body was unable to break out in cold sweat, I heaved a relieved breath while patting my neck to confirm it was still properly attached.

The enemy took the opportunity to check their daggers.

Chiome's attack had managed to put a large hole in the hood of our attacker.

We finally got a look at the enemy's face when a gust of wind blew the remains of the hood away.

Black cat ears sat atop their head and his red eyes were contrasted by his pale skin..... he was obviously a beastman.

I couldn't tell because his tail was still hidden under his cloak, but he appeared to be from the same cat tribe as Chiome.

Chiome, who normally never showed her emotions, let out a haggard cry as she caught sight of the enemy's face.

“.....Sa-suke..... oniisan.....!?”

Her shaking voice and the shocked expression said it all.

The name she spoke belong to a senior member of the Blade Heart Clan's six great ninjas.

If the enemy was one of the six great ninjas, why was he on this continent and what was he doing here? There were too many unknown factors in this situation.

The emotion on Chiome's face as she called out that name..... there was no doubt that the enemy was the real deal and not some kind of imposter.

“.....Sasuke! What's going on!? Why..... what here you doing here!?”

Sasuke narrowed his red eyes and raised his daggers when Chiome cried out to him.

There was no hesitation in his actions, as if Chiome's voice hadn't even reached him at all.

However, the fight with Sasuke did not continue.

Huahauahau!! Chiaaoooooaa!!

The remaining giants that had been roaming through the village brandished their stone weapons and were heading straight for us.

The tiger tribesmen that had been charging towards the village scattered when the giants suddenly ran towards my group, completely ignored by the giants.

Sasuke glanced at the eccentric behavior of the giants before he ran in the opposite direction of the giants.

Chiome immediately chased after Sasuke while calling out to him.

“Wait!! Sasuke-oniisan!! Why are you doing this!?”

Unfortunately, Sasuke was faster than Chiome and the distance between them only grew wider.

The upheaval in her heart was so great that the normally graceful Chiome tripped over her own feet and fell over.

“Khu!”

Ariane rushed over to Chiome to help her up.

Chiome’s face had gone pale with worry as Ariane tried to speak to her.

“.....Chiome-chan that Sasuke person is.....”

“!!”

However, Chiome fiercely shook her head as if she were trying to prevent the words from reaching her.

Their behavior indicated that something was definitely wrong.

The ground began to rumble as I looked at them and I realized that this place was about to become a battlefield.

I caught sight of the giants suddenly changing directions.

The giants were heading in the direction Sasuke had run off to. They followed after Sasuke as if it were the natural thing to do.

Despite there having been so many tiger tribesmen near them they made a sudden shift and chased after Sasuke.....

It was as if the giant had been searching the village for Sasuke since the very beginning.

“..... What in the world is going on?”

My doubts were overshadowed by the noise of the approaching tiger tribesmen.

With a battle cry, they chased after the giants.

Chapter 17: Undead Person

The Kuwana plains, in a destroyed village belonging to the tiger tribe.

The recent appearance of the Giants from the “Black Forest” has resulted in the destruction of many villages..... it seems.

I’d heard a bit of news from the warriors that had buried the five dead giants.

No survivors had been found when the warriors searched the remains of the village.

The brooding expressions on their faces showed that there was no hope.

At least ten giants had attacked this rather small village.

As of this moment, the young man who had reached the Ena clan’s main village was the only survivor.

The flames of vengeance that resided in the warriors’ eyes as they fought the giants vanished when they looked upon the utterly devastated village.

While I could try to revive them, the magic wouldn’t work on those who lost their heads or whose bodies were in a giant’s stomach.

It was something I’d learned when I revived a group of people that had been killed by bandits.

The gloomy atmosphere left in the wake of this incident affected Chiome as well, since she sat with a depressed look on her face.

She had remained silent ever since Sasuke fled.

While not the talkative sort to begin with, there was something different about her current silence.

Ariane didn’t know what to say to her either and simply averted her gaze.

I tried calling out to her in my usual tone as best as I could.

“Ariane-dono, are your legs and hips alright?”

Ariane was aware of my intention and tried to make a cheerful expression as she nodded.

“I’m alright, my legs and hip have already recovered. Thank you, Arc.”

She rubbed her waist a little as she answered.

To be honest, her hips weren’t the problem, but telling a woman to her face that her butt had been hurting because she had spent too long in the saddle was obviously not something one should ever do.

Now was not the right time to joke about these things.

Even so, I didn’t think that recovery magic would be effective on sore butts. As long as I apply healing magic, riding the the dragon mount shouldn’t be an issue.

While I was considering this, the leader of the Ena clan and several other tiger tribesmen walked up to me.

Those that followed behind Hou must be the other clan leaders since they wore more luxurious armor then the regular warriors and were more physically intimidating

When Hou was right in front of me, his eyes immediately narrowed in on Chiome while asking me a question in a serious tone.

“Arc-dono, you said that your friend from the cat tribe was from the Northern Continent, correct?”

I nodded my head while being confused as to why he was asking me the question.

“Half of the giants that attacked the village chased after the cat person when he appeared.....”

Although it’d been a chaotic fight, people had noticed us.

“The giants were chasing that person? Was it that person who caused the giants to attack our villages!?”

Hou then spoke with open hostility and I could already tell where he was heading with this line of questioning but was left wondering why he asked them in the first place.

“Don’t try to make any excuses! That girl right there! She’s acquainted with that person! My men saw the two talking!!”

One of the men that Hou brought along began pressing Chiome for information.

They’d bore witness to that exchange.

However, I didn’t say anything as they pressured us..... no matter what I said it wouldn’t make much of a difference.

Before the hot-head clan leader could reach Chiome, Ariane stepped forward to protect her.

The clan leader was tall, even for a tiger tribesmen, and had an impressive physique, but Ariane’s glare and the flames that emanated from her body kept him at bay.

Although the tiger tribesmen and normal beastmen couldn’t see the spirits that floated around her body, their hair stood up as they felt the fighting spirit she was projecting.

The clan leader held his breath as Ariane began to talk.

“It’s true that the two know each other..... but he is no longer her ally.”

Chiome’s shoulders slumped when she heard Ariane.

However, the clan head didn’t understand what she was saying and raised his voice again.

“How can we trust what you say!? Why should we even trust outsiders with our war!?”

The eyes of the surrounding tiger tribesmen pierced my group when they heard him.

The situation with the giants had been an urgent one and Hou hadn't had time to explain why we had come along.

While Ein and those of the Urira knew our circumstances, the majority of the warriors were still in the dark.

Ariane's eyes were dead set on the crowd as she made her decision.

"The person who appeared back there was undead."

What she said was news to me. The clan leaders were also surprised by her revelation and began looking back and forth between each other.

The majority of the surrounding warriors were left in a confused state.

Based on their reactions and the bits of conversation I picked up, the tiger tribe was unfamiliar with the concept of being undead.

Ariane began to explain herself more when she saw how they were reacting.

"It seems that they don't appear in these plains, but the undead are the dead that get up and wander about. Elves like me are capable of detecting the impurities that cling to them."

She provided a brief explanation as her golden eyes scanned the crowd to gauge their reactions.

Elven eyes had the ability to see spirits that were invisible to humans.

When Sasuke had appeared, she must have seen the 'undead impurities' coming off him.

Chiome would have been unable to see those impurities but she might have caught the scent of death on him.

Her noise was effective at great distances, so she must have realized what condition Sasuke was in when he stood in front of her.

Well, one would definitely want to believe they made a mistake when one of their friends was suddenly standing in front of them as an undead.

Her continued silence in the face of Ariane's claims probably meant she'd yet to accept the facts.

But her eyes and nose had the power to perceive the truth better than any human could.

In my skeletal form, I was unable to see undead impurities like Ariane and other elves since that ability seemed to be affected by my curse.

I was in a similar situation to Chiome and a few others of the Blade Heart Clan.

While they were able to draw upon the power of the spirits to use special abilities, they had no way to identify the undead by sight.

“Kyun!”

Ponta uttered a cry of encouragement as if she had guessed what I had been thinking.

“Well, you wouldn't be deceived by appearances.”

While patting Ponta's head and complimenting her, I evaluated what I knew.

Somehow Chiome's brother figure Sasuke had shown up on the Southern Continent.

Even I had thought that Sasuke looked pale when I saw him, but his appearance hadn't changed to the point where Chiome couldn't recognize him.

But Ariane had made her statement in a matter of fact tone.

“.....It easy to say that, but where is the proof to back up your statement!?”

The other clan leaders nodded along with what the hot-head said.

Only one person, no, Hou and Ein were the only ones that looked at Ariane and me directly.

It was meaningless to press us for information here.

“I do not know Chiome-dono’s personal circumstance, but I know that her clan has been looking into that man’s whereabouts. It was by sheer coincidence that we came across him here. I was the one that suggested this trip in the first place.”

“Such a thing.....!”

One of the clan leaders tried to raise an argument against me.

“.....What will this achieve!? Thirty giants were sighted, ten were found in this village, but only five were defeated! I don’t know why the giants were following him, but aren’t there other villages in the direction they were heading!?”

Not only the leaders, but the surrounding warriors began to stir at my question.

I had no idea if there were any villages in the direction Sasuke went, but I said it anyway to gauge their reactions.

The warriors swarmed the clan leaders and pleaded with them to pursue the giants.

Hou was the one that put an end to all of the commotion.

“We will pursue the giants, confirm the village’s well-being, and protect it!”

A battle cry was sounded at Hou’s declaration.

As the warriors rushed to mount their dragon mounts, my eyes focused on Hou as he approached me.

In a crossed armed stance, he made one statement.

“..... Show us!”

Saying only that, Hou and the rest of the clan leaders return to their own dragon mounts.

While I couldn’t understand their reasoning, I got the gist of it.

The goodwill I'd been building up to use in the negotiations later on seemed to have been used to temporarily clear us of suspicion.

“..... Apologies, Arc-dono.”

Chiome, who'd been silently watching the conversation apologized and lowered her head to me.

“There's no need to apologize Chiome-dono. Will you be alright from here on out?”

It was one thing to deal with the giants, but it was another thing entirely for Chiome to confront her former companion.

Chiome looked me in the eye and nodded her head.

“This is my clan's issue. So.....”

Raw emotions seeped into Chiome's voice as she clenched her fist and choked on the latter half of her statement before walking towards our mount.

Something was missing from her expressions and she carried herself like a ghost. I asked a similarly worried Ariane about the situation.

“Ariane-dono, aren't undead like Sasuke-dono..... aren't undead like him suppose to be rare occurrences?”

Ariane raised an eyebrow at my question and frowned.

My image of the undead were the common ones like zombies and skeletons, none of whom looked or moved like Sasuke did.

He resembled a vampire more than anything else, but I didn't even know if they existed in this world.

The only agile undead monsters I'd seen were the Ghoul Worms we came across in the caverns near the Dragon King's territory, but even they still looked like decomposing corpses.

Sasuke passed for a common cat-eared beastman.

While elves in this world could detect the undead impurities he gave off, I couldn't see anything even though I could see the lights that active spirits gave off.

"This is the first time I've seen an undead like that..... My father..... or other village elders may know something about it though."

Ariane looked in the direction Sasuke had run off in as she spoke.

Unfortunately, we didn't have time to go back to the village and ask him. There was also a chance that he couldn't help us and we'd still be left in the dark.

".....We can't do anything without following the giants."

Leaving off on that statement, I made my way to our resting dragon mount as it chewed on some grass and leaped onto the saddle.

I grasped the mount's reins after lifting Chiome onto the saddle and once Ariane reluctantly climbed on with a sigh.

When I looked towards the other tiger tribesmen I saw Hou giving a signal in front of the group.

The warriors immediately set off into the plains.

Chapter 18: Invasion

We left the Ena's main village under a rather anxious atmosphere, but now a somber mood hung over the entire party.

No, the tiger tribe warriors were still angry at the giants and the subjugation force was still feeling tense, so it didn't feel like anything had changed at all.

It was obvious why things were the way they were.

Chiome was sitting in front of me, my arms reaching around her to hold the reins of the dragon mount, so there was no way for me to make out her expression.

I remember her talking about taking some Kraken meat to her senior Sasuke when we ventured to this continent on the Liebbelta.

My current body was that of a skeleton and with my emotions bottled as they were, I couldn't offer her any actual sympathy despite knowing how much she must have been hurting.

If I were to regain my physical body, my reasoning would be hampered the release of my suppressed emotions. I wouldn't have that much confidence in that situation.

The reason I was able to think rationally about this was due to me being in my skeletal form, perhaps this kind of state is similar to the emotional detachment hardened soldiers have.

However, Chiome has not yet reached that state.

.....she isn't a soldier with a long service record, after all, she is just a little girl.

I shook my head and sighed at that fact.

I'm not that good at thinking things through, so it couldn't be helped.

With my sword I could cut down any enemy, with my shield I could protect my friends from any attack, and with my armor, I was safe from all harm. Merely

worrying about this won't solve anything.

.....Well, I suppose I did make the mistake of leaving my sword and shield behind previously.

Just how long has it been since we left the destroyed village?

So far, I've only had three requests to apply soreness relief with recovery magic.

Since we couldn't afford to lower our speed, I had to reach behind my back to invoke the spell, so from the side it looked like I was trying to grab Ariane's butt.

I sighed and looked towards the sky to estimate the time. Daylight was starting to wane and dusk wasn't far off.

Lunch time had probably passed by now.

Shortly after, the subjugation force reached the hill the village rested on.

The village didn't even amount to ten yurts. A herd of livestock was close to the village and a group of warriors in front of the village took note of us as we approached.

The village showed no sign of damage and everything appeared to be peaceful.

It seems the giants hadn't arrived yet.

As we decreased our speed, Hou came to a stop and dismounted in front the people that gathered at the village entrance.

I brought our mount to a stop near the village as well.

However, as soon as I did so, Hou faced the subjugation force and started shouting instructions after confirming something with the villages warriors.

"The giants passed by this village and headed north! Move out!!"

We immediately set off in that direction after that.

The clan leaders were at the head of the pack and I caught sight of them riding

close to one another, discussing something.

Was there some kind of problem?

That question was soon answered.

The subjugation force came to a stop atop a small hill.

No, where we stood now was roughly the same height as the plains behind us, and beneath us were lowlands.

From here I could even see the sea opening up at the edge of my vision.

There was a gentle slope leading into the lowland and, as if it was drawing a border from the east to the west, a wall-like construction had been built across the entirety of it.

This structure was like some sort of castle wall, resembling the world famous Great Wall of China that stretches across thousands of miles.

There were countless rectangular embrasures spread across this wall, and it was apparent that this was primarily a defensive bulwark.

The embrasures were big enough to let us see the cannons... no, some kind of ballistas had been mounted in there.

Seeing all this, I remembered hearing from some beastman that humans were living behind a giant wall on the other side of the plains.

In that case, behind this wall must be the human territory.

For some of the tiger tribesmen, this was their first time seeing these walls. Quite a few of them were unable to hide their surprise.

Well, that was to be expected in the face of such magnificent architecture.

Just how much labor and resources were put into making such a thing..... I couldn't even wrap my head around it.

“So, it seems the giants headed towards the human-occupied, northern peninsula.”

With that statement, Hou looked down upon the wall with an annoyed glare.

So we were looking down upon a peninsula.

And this wall had been built to seal off said peninsula.

However, I noticed something amiss with that massive wall.

Evenly spread across the length of this wall, giant, tower-like structures had been built that probably served as both lookouts and barracks.

However, there wasn't a single living person to be seen anywhere. When I looked to the hundred and fifty warriors along the hill, I could see tension clearly building amongst them.

"There's not a single person on the wall, is it normal for it to be left unattended?"

The wrinkles on Hou's forehead deepened as he looked down at the wall and thought over my question.

"No, there are always soldiers stationed near the ballista to fend off any harassers that turn up."

I once again looked towards the ramparts but was still unable to see anyone.

In fact, it was rather abandoned at the moment.

"Hou-sama!!"

One of the warriors shouted for Hou as he rode towards our direction on his dragon mount.

Judging from his appearance, he must have been a scout.

The urgentness of his report was clear on his face.

Hou turned his mount towards the approaching scout and silently signaled for him to speak with a nod of his head.

"A section of the eastern wall has been breached! There are also the corpses of

multiple giants that appear to have fallen in battle!”

The clan leaders and surrounding warriors began to stir after hearing the report.

“The wall’s been breached!? How deep is it!?”

“All the way though! The Giants probably attacked the humans’ wall!”

The clan leaders and warriors were surprised by that bit of information.

It was hard to tell how large the wall was, but it should be roughly around ten meters high.

However, since the giants had an average height of six meters, the wall wouldn’t have been much of a hindrance considering their strength and endurance.

The fact that several giants had been killed, showed that even humans could oppose them to some extent. Most likely by shooting spears into their chest with their ballistas.

“The wall has been breached!? I couldn’t make it past that wall no matter what I tried!”

“Was that guy leading the giants towards the human settlement since the beginning!?”

While the other clan leaders were shouting, Hou was thinking about what the scout had reported.

“All warriors, converge at the breach in the wall!!”

At his command, everyone headed towards the eastern section of the wall.

The location in question wasn’t that far away.

At the place where the wall had been breached, the massive walls had been reduced to a mountain of rubble. One could even see the other side from here.

Surrounding the hole in the wall were innumerable traces of the giants’ rampage, with ballista arrows covering the ground in front of the wall like a thicket.

Six dead giants laid on this side of the destroyed wall, all of them with large, spear-like arrows sticking out of their chests. There was the occasional corpse of a soldier, but no sign of any survivors.

I then caught sight of a figure running into the grasslands from the behind the mountain of rubble.

“What!?”

Based on the reactions of the warriors I wasn’t the only one that saw it.

Roughly around twenty years old, one of his ears had been torn off and his tail was rather short. I had no idea which tribe this person was from, but he was definitely a beast man.

Black irons, attached to broken chains, were wrapped around the person’s limbs and neck.

As the man approached, his worn-out and torn clothes became noticeable.

He’d probably been a slave working near the wall. When he caught sight of the tiger tribesmen subjugation force, he must have come running out of his hiding place.

Or so I thought until I saw bits of the wall crumbling and a giant appearing from the other side of the wall.

The giant’s accompanying roar caused the young beastman slave to cower in fear.

“Everyone, don’t allow the giant to reach him!! Slay the monster!!”

On Hou’s command, the warriors charged down the hill with a battle cry.

However, I didn’t take part in the charge and stayed put.

It was to be expected. While it seemed that they were just charging forward at full speed, the warriors managed to maintain an even distance between each other

This wasn't something an amateur could learn to do simply by watching them.

The giant let out another roar as the ground around it began to rumble.

However, there was still a bit of distance between the giant and the warriors, while the slave was within the giant's range.

The giant had already set its sights on the young slave.

The warriors wouldn't make it in time, so I invoked a spell to create an opening.

"Full power! Flame Bullet!!"

When I put as much strength as I could into the spell, the huge ball of fire that formed in my upraised hands was hot enough to heat up my helmet.

The warriors were shocked when they looked back and saw the sheer size of the fireball.

Nearly everyone's eyes were fixated on the fireball as it cut through the air on a collision course with the giant.

The fireball flew over the heads of the charging warriors and caught the giant in the center of its chest with a flashy explosion.

"Oh? Look, Ariane-dono, it managed to hit it!"

"Wait, what? You didn't even aim that thing!?"

It hadn't been my intention to hit the giant, I just wanted to stop its movement. That's why I made the fireball so large, I didn't expect it to fly so fast.

By the time the subjugation group had reached the giant, its charred body laid on the ground unmoving.

Since it was covered in black fur, it was hard to tell where the burns were.

When the clan leaders managed to regain their senses, they rushed over to the young slave, and asked me to treat him as I reached their location.

"— When the Giants tore through the wall everyone else was..... I was the

only one.”

The young man began answering Hou’s questions after I healed him with my magic.

Looking beneath his tattered clothes, his unhealthy thinness showed that he was malnourished.

“Is the town ahead named Tajiento? Are there still other beastmen are imprisoned there?”

The young man silently nodded his head at Hou’s follow up questions.

The clan leaders began to discuss what to do with the young man’s reply.

“What’ll we do? Now that the walls have been breached, this is a good opportunity, right?”

“We can take advantage of the chaos while the Giants run amok in Tajiento.”

“We need to decide now, once the trouble passes so does our opportunity to strike.”

“We don’t know the town’s scale, it’ll be impossible to cover the entire thing if it’s the size of Fernandez.”

“Then do we just abandon this chance?”

As the clan leaders discussed things amongst themselves, the warriors began voicing their opinions, while I remained focused on Hou.

Hou and the rest of them leaders eventually linked arms as they reached an agreement.

“We shall invade the human town and rescue the beastmen slaves! The humans have attacked and imprisoned our brethren for far too long. However, ignore them when possible and focus on freeing the slaves! If a giant blocks your path slay it! Be on the lookout for the retreat signal!!”

Cheers erupted from the nearby warriors. The one hundred and fifty members of

the subjugation groups were divided into seven infiltration units.

Well, eight if you included my group.

My shoulders drooped at thought of the tiger tribe Vs giant battle.

Then my eyes landed on Chiome, staring out into the distance, and I remembered the other issue that remained.

The rematch was fast approaching.

Chapter 19: The Tajiento Crisis

The peninsula that lied within the northern region of the Southern Continent was under the control of the Great Leburan Empire.

A port city, which was on the same scale as eminent cities within the mainland empire, had been built around a naval port on the eastern side of the peninsula.

A large church of the Hiruku religion sat on the same street as the city's major piers. The priests and the holy knights had their own dormitories, while the cardinal lived within his own mansion.

There was a clear distinction between the mansion and the surrounding buildings. The elegance of the mansion was emphasized by red- and white-bricked mosaics and white, ornamental support pillars.

Within this three-story mansion provided by the church was the cardinal's private room.

It was a large room with a high ceiling, an impressive mural painted on one wall and an expensive carpet covering the floor. There were plain furnishings within the room, which gave it the resemblance of a king's private quarters.

In the center of the room sat a specially made king sized bed.

The bed's canopy nearly reached the ceiling and was made of luxurious embroidered cloth, and there was a large shadow sitting behind it.

The large figure's body was seemingly composed of numerous rolls of fat, a bald head with beady eyes, flabby cheeks, and an overall frog-like appearance.

This was the mansion's master cardinal, Charos Acedia Industria.

He was currently eating from the bowl of fruit he usually kept filled beside his bed.

"This day was a peaceful one. The mainland has been silent since they sent that fellow here. Hmhmhm, giving him a measly hundred ghost knights was a simple

matter. I am a genius♪”

Charos’ large body jiggled as his laughing caused the bed to creak.

When he noticed the fruit juices sticking to his hand, he simply wiped it on the canopy.

“Simply spending time in bed is a wonderful way to pass the day. However, while this is true bliss, I still wonder if anything is happening in the outside world?”

Charos’ rolled on his back as he thought aloud.

As if wanting to answer his question, his door was suddenly banged on repeatedly.

“Charos-sama! It’s an emergency! Pardon me!”

After entering the room, a priest kneeled down a short distance away from the bed.

Charos was dumbfounded for a moment before displeasure began to show on his face.

But, the priest prostrating on the group was unaware of this as he began his report while looking towards the ground.

“According to our scouts, a group of almost twenty never before seen monsters have broken through the defensive wall and are heading towards the city! The governor has requested the aid of the holy knights to fend off those giant monsters!!”

When the priest finished his report he lowered his head further and asked on how to proceed.

Charos rose from his bed with a grimace on his face.

“Hh, even if they’re monsters there’s only twenty of them? Why do they even need the holy knights? The governor should have two thousand soldiers at his disposal, right? There aren’t even five hundred holy knights, why does he need

to rope them in?”

Charos walked towards the window which laid in the direction of the city. While the church and its lodgings could be seen, anything beyond that was blocked off by the church’s high perimeter walls.

The priest walked up behind Charos and stood on his toes to look past Charos’ massive body.

“Charos-sama, we can view the city from the church’s bell tower. We can grasp the current condition from there! Please!”

“Hmm, though I do want to know what’s going on, I really don’t want to go up there. Besides, I really don’t want to deal with this annoyance”

Charos puffed out his cheeks as he complained with a sigh and looked down at the prostrating priest before walking towards the door.

The priest rose his head and looked at the cardinal’s back as he left the room.

Feeling the stare on this back, Charos looked back at the priest who had yet to move.

“Hurry up and show me the way! I don’t normally climb the tower and therefore don’t know how to get there!”

“Y-Yes! Right away!”

The priest had a joyous expression on his face as he passed by the cardinal, like a dog going for a walk with its owner.

Charos hopped behind the priest with the speed one wouldn’t expect from someone of his size. It was like watching a giant frog in motion.

Before long, Charos reached the foot of the bell tower’s spiral staircase in that manner, gasping for air and wiping sweat from his eyes the entire trip.

“Haa, which fool decided to build this tower? They shouldn’t have put so many stairs in it. We still have to climb these.....”

Although his large body shook and he complained the entire trip, Charos steady footsteps indicated that there was more than fat beneath his clothing.

The rather lanky priest accompanying him nearly fell over and was short on breath as they climbed the bell tower's stairs.

A little above halfway up the tower the lanky priest went up to one of the ventilation windows and timidly looked out of it.

The windows were facing west, so the setting sun blinded the priest's eyes for a moment. As soon as he got used to the light, he was able to look down at the city.

When he saw the state of the city, the priest turned around with a shocked expression and started to shout.

"Ch-Charos-sama! Here! You can see the state of the city from here!! It's them!"

Even if this was the bell tower, the stairway wasn't very wide so the priest's echoed shout forced Charos to cover his ears.

"Okay, okay! I can hear you just fine, there's no need to yell."

Charos looked out of the window pointed out by the priest, all the while complaining.

The window was set right above the church's thin, outer wall. Though the priest had been rather agitated by the what he saw, the window only offered a narrow field of view above the wall.

Charos' large body pushed the priest aside as he looked out the window himself.

Charos smiled at first as he watched the setting sun until he realized multiple fires were burning throughout the city.

The fires were mostly centered around the city wall and were still a good distance away from the church.

A strange creature could be seen passing by a brick rooftop in the distance.

Back-lighted by the setting sun, the giant black silhouette didn't have a head and the surrounding buildings allowed one to see just how huge it was.

The black-furred giant was easily able to destroy the roof of one of the buildings, grabbing something and pushing it into the huge hole that opened up in its chest.

Charos' eyes popped open as he watched the chaos play out in front of him.

The giant grabbed a person and stuffed into its mouth as if it was just having a little snack. He was able to see four of these creatures from this window.

The citizen's desperate screams were carried on the wind to this location.

There were sweat stains on the window frame when Charos looked back at the priest.

"Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!"

Charos merely shoved his face back out the window and began to scream.

"What the hell happened!? The city is under attack!? How did this happen!?"

After bursting into a manic rant, Charos turned to the priest again who had no answers for him.

Charos shook his head at the blank reply before he began shouting out instructions.

"The holy knights! Deploy every single holy knight at our disposal!!"

"Ye-Yes!!"

The priest bowed his head at Charos' instructions. When he raised his head again, Charos was already making his way down the stairs.

"Ch-Charos-sama! Where are you going!?"

Charos answered the priest without looking back.

"Reinforcements! We need to gather reinforcements, quickly——!!"

Charos rushed pace caused him to trip as he answered the priest's question, and proceeded to bounce down the stairs until he hit the support tower's support pillar on the ground floor.

“Charos-sama!! Charos-sama!!”

The priest shouted down the tower with a worried look on his face. He caught sight of Charos standing up and running off to some place.

He'd just taken a fall equivalent to one from a fourth floor.

While the priest was surprised by Charos' sudden recovery, he managed to pull himself together and headed towards the knights' dormitory.

As for Charos, he made his way to the cathedral's basement.

The dark stairway leading to the basement was extremely narrow, and at the end of the passage was a huge metal door that was sealed with a keyhole-less lock.

Because people rarely came down here, a thin layer of dust covered the door, and a unique fragrance leaked from behind the door.

Charos stepped forward and grabbed hold of the lock.

When Charos concentrated magic in his hand the metal shackle was undone with a loud click.

After Charos pushed the door open, he walked in the large, shelf-filled room, a place the light from the magic tools could not reach.

The shelves in the room were filled with an innumerable amount of wooden coffins.

These catacombs had been around since the city's founding.

Charos paid no mind to the coffins surrounding him while his footsteps echoed throughout the room as he passed by the shelves.

“Why did this have to happen? Now Tajiento is on the verge of collapse.”

Charos would have continued to complain, but he stopped walking when he had

a realization.

“Did that fellow from the mainland have something to do with this!? The pope wouldn’t object to using these guys here, will he!? Right.”

Charos reached his wits’ end as he stood shouting his soliloquy in the middle of the catacombs.

After a few minutes, Charos made his decision and quickly ran to the center of the catacombs..... when he reached the altar set up there, he grasped the black cube that had been sitting on it.

“Ah, this is so annoying! I’ll make sure the one from the mainland and the one in black will be dealt with!!”

Charos infused magic into his right hand as he made that declaration.

Light began to spread from the black cube when he slammed his hand on it. In response to his actions, the lids of all the coffins flew off at once and fully armored knights sat up within them.

As the warriors grasped hold of their weapons and moved about as if they were just waking up, Charos raised the black cube in his hand.

“Your orders are to subjugate the black giants! Don’t leave a single one alive!!”

All the armored beings within the catacomb began to move at once.

The catacomb had been built beneath the church and had a multitude of underground passages that connected the church to various locations throughout the city.

The undead knights’ used those passages to spread throughout the city at an incredible pace.

Whenever a group of holy knights noticed the mysterious army emerging from beneath the church they attempted to block the army’s way but were immediately overwhelmed and killed.

The undead soldiers numbered nearly ten thousand.

The arrival of an army one-third the size of Tajiento's population appearing out of nowhere only added fuel to the fire of an already chaotic situation.

Only one person considered the situation as satisfactory..... and that was the priest who had been sent from the mainland.

Standing on the roof of a brick house, he watched with a thin smile as armored soldiers started pouring out of the church's dormitories.

As the armored soldiers started pushing their way through the escaping citizens to head for the giants, he sighed while raising one of his eyebrows.

"Well, I don't know how many residents will die in the confusion, but the giants will be dealt with at least. What you've done goes against the Pope's will, but then again I'm better suited for your position as cardinal."

The priest chuckled and praised himself as he took a round, shining crystal from his breast pocket.

The priest thrust his hand into the air as perverted delight crept into his voice.

"Kill all the living! Kill everyone, and convert this city into a ghost town for the Pope's sake!!"

As if reacting to his command, the crystal began to shine brightly and the movements of the armored soldiers around him stopped for a second. The next moment, they used the swords they were carrying to slaughter the city's residents.

And then, hell was unleashed.

The corpses of the old and slow littered the streets in minutes. A father tried to protect his child only to have his head cut off and fall into his child's arms. A mother held onto her weeping child as they both were ran through with a sword.

"Hahaha!! You will now become the Pope's vanguard!! Weep joyous tears and thank me for providing you with——!?"

The priest felt something approaching him from behind.

When he looked back he saw a raven-haired red-eyed beastmen kneeling before him.

“Ah, it’s you. Killing the children and female giants to lead them here has provided excellent results. Go interfere with those fighting the giants near the wall.”

With a chuckle and a jerk of his chin he sent his servant to do as beading.

The beastman—, no, the ninja Sasuke simply nodded his head before he started leaping from rooftop to rooftop in the direction of the city wall.

Another smile found its way on the priest’s lips as he watched the ninja fade into the distance.

“That one was a good find. Once I become cardinal, it would be best to ask the Pope for a transfer.”

The man rested his gaze on the hellscape beneath him as he spoke.

Chapter 20: Encounter

Excluding my party, the one hundred and fifty members of the tiger tribesmen subjugation force were heading towards the human city of Tajiento.

Wherever I looked, it looked like the entire peninsula had been converted into farmland under the hands of humanity, leaving me genuinely amazed at the achievement.

Occasionally we would pass by an oddity I've yet to see in this world, small villages that had no defensive walls around them.

Since the major wall had been built at the peninsula's neck, there was no need to worry about monster attacks.

However, the quiet countryside was now wrought with tension.

A huge swath of destruction had been left behind in the fields... as if someone had drawn lines across the growing fields that were all heading towards the same spot.

There was no doubt that the giants had been through here.

Now and then we would come across some maintained roads between the individual fields.... and we also saw that the entire breadth of these roads were filled with human families that were burdened with luggage or nothing except the clothes on their backs.

When they caught sight of the large group of tiger tribesmen on dragon mounts, the humans would hide inside the fields, hold their breath and wait for us to pass by.

The fact that they didn't start a commotion at the sight of a large group of beastmen, and considering the direction they were fleeing towards, suggested that the giants had already invaded Tajiento.

It was only sensible to run away from walking disasters.

The tiger tribesmen warriors, even Hou, snorted at the sight of the fleeing people and we continued our advance.

“The humans behind the wall are all weaklings. Without their wall, they’d have been easy to deal with.”

The surrounding warriors began to laugh at the fleeing people behind us.

“Be that as it may, but these humans had been the ones to build the wall that stopped us from entering these lands.”

After Hou turned around to reprimand them for their jokes, the warriors fell silent again.

When the sky turned a dark shade of red, we finally reached a location from where we could see Tajiento.

What we found was a city engulfed in flames.

Screams and the roar of the flames were overshadowed by strange bellows from throughout the city.

A giant would occasionally appear on the roof of a brick building before disappearing again.

The city wall wasn’t as impressive as the one we had passed and it was roughly the same height as the giants. Multiple sections of the wall had collapsed and I could actually see inside the city.

Among those escaping through the holes in the wall were a few beastmen.

When Hou saw what was happening, he immediately began instructing the rescue team that’d been set up beforehand.

“This is good! Don’t bother starting unnecessary fights with the humans! Devote your attention to rescuing our brethren and kill only those who oppose you!! Don’t forget your warrior’s pride!! Go!!”

At Hou’s command, the warriors split into their groups and entered the city.

The city itself was quite large and the streets were spacious. While the dragon mounts couldn't enter the alleyways, the warriors could dismount and search those areas and buildings on foot.

The unit under Hou's direct command stayed outside the city and would act as a line of defense for the escaping beastmen.

I had expected Hou to be the type to lead from the front, considering the way the tiger tribesmen usually acted. His cool head under pressure may explain why his clan was the largest within the plains.

After bowing my head to Hou I turned towards the battlefield below.

Ariane, Chiome, and I would enter the city on foot and support the rescue units by eliminating any opposition we found.

This wasn't something Hou had ordered, rather we volunteered to do so..... basically, it was no different from our usual pattern of killing any enemy we met.

"You ready to go Ariane-dono, Chiome-dono?"

I looked my companions in the eyes and asked them that question.

"It's basically the same as the raid we helped Chiome-chan with before, right?"

Ariane grasped the Sword of the Lion King and focused her golden eyes on the city below.

".....Hmm."

When Ariane turned towards Chiome she let out a large sigh before nodding and replying.

"..... I won't say that I'm all right, but I'll do the best I can."

"Kyun!"

Ponta let out a spirited cry from atop my head in response to Chiome's reply.

"Sorry, everyone. When I asked about the devil nails back in Plymouth, I never thought it would lead to this."

Chiome shook her head when she heard my comment.

“No, had it not been for Arc-dono I never would have found the friend who had gone missing. This was a good thing.”

Seeing her obvious attempt to put a positive spin on this situation I could only offer a weak reply.

“..... I see.”

The person who had been close to Chiome and who led the giants here was somewhere in the city. Chiome was probably aware of that.

There was nothing any of us could do for an undead, so if we came across him we'd have to fight him.

“Well then,let's go! We're going to do this the usual way!”

The two of them grabbed my shoulders when I said that and I evoked the spell that I've become the most familiar with.

“Dimensional Step”

We were instantaneously transferred right outside the collapsed wall.

There wasn't anyone in the buildings near the wall since they'd already fled the city shortly after the giants destroyed the wall. Large fires and the sound of scorching materials were all around us.

Mixed in within the flames were the sounds of terrified screams.

I moved down a nearby street with Dimensional Step. Because the debris from the destroyed buildings blocked the way, there was no way a dragon mount could directly follow the giants.

Because of the city's large scale, it would be difficult to free all the enslaved beastmen like Hou wanted.

However, by allowing the giants to remain mostly unopposed during their slaughter, the rescue team would have more time to take advantage of the

confusion.

My group, however, would kill any giant we came across. There should have been at least twenty of them roaming about.

“How is it, Chiome-dono?”

She shook her head at my simple question.

Chiome had been scanning the areas we passed for signs of life with the sensory abilities she developed as a ninja, but it didn’t seem to be going well

Back in Rhoden Kingdom’s capital, the Blade Heart Clan had already been prepared for their raid, thus they had a nearly complete understanding of the city’s layout.

However, we had virtually no prep time for this spontaneous raid and the layout of Tajiento was unknown to us.

We needed to gain our bearing before anything else.

After a couple more transfers we stood in a city square. A stone fountain had been built in the center of the square.

Fires had engulfed the majority of the surrounding buildings and a few people had run to the fountain for safety.

Soldiers in lightweight armor were defending the area with swords and shields, from knights in dark-grey armor.

“Huh? What’s going on? I thought the giants were attacking this city?”

Ariane shook her head in confusion when I unconsciously asked the questions that crossed my mind.

I looked back at the strange situation just in time to see one of the lightly armored soldiers use his spear to send an armored knight’s helmet flying

The helmet gave off a dull thud as it hit the ground.

However, the knight continued fighting as if it hadn’t been affected at all and

continued to cross blades with the soldier.

Everyone's breath caught when they saw what was beneath the knight's helmet.

The head of the knight didn't belong to a human, it was skeletal just like mine currently was.

"Ariane-dono, it's like me! Is it possible that all the knights are like that?"

"I don't think so! If they were all like Arc..... this city would have fallen long before we arrived, right?"

Ariane replied to my anxious shout with a calm tone.

"Those knights are obviously undead. Just what is going on here?"

Chiome narrowed her eyes and her small nose twitched a bit as she observed the knights.

Unfortunately, that was about all we could assess from the situation.

Why was this town overrun with undeads in knight armor? Moreover, why was said armor clearly made by human hands?

If one or two deceased knights had turned undead, then it would simply be the attire they'd been buried in, but there were at least ten knights wearing the same armor here.

There were also more of them climbing over the rubble and gradually moving towards the square.

"No point in worrying about it now, we'll ask the soldiers after we save them!"

And just like that I whipped out the Holy Thunder Sword and ran towards the approaching undead knights. However, when the human soldiers noticed my appearance, they thought that another armored knight had appeared and raised their swords and shields in response.

There wasn't enough time to explain, so I didn't even try to.

I took a detour around the soldiers and confronted the approaching undead

knights.

There was a shower of bones and metal pieces as I swung my sword with enough force to cut metal like paper.

While they were covered in full-body armor, it wasn't that thick or strong. A common sword or spear probably wouldn't be able to get through it, but faced with the mythical Sword of Holy Thunder it might as well be made from cardboard.

"I intended to hunt giants, but to battle those like myself....."

My sword wavered a bit as I contemplated that fact. Every time I attacked an undead knight, they produced a shattering sound as they were reduced to heaps of junk.

Faster than it took to make instant ramen, more than a dozen undead knights had been reduced to dust.

"This is quite something... Anyway, there is something I would like to ask you people?"

I rested my sword on my shoulder as I looked at the dumbfounded expressions of the civilians and soldiers behind me. It was clear that they couldn't grasp what had just happened.

When I took a step towards them unrestrained fear appeared on the soldiers' faces.

"Arc, behind you!!"

Ariane drew her sword and ran after something that appeared at the edge of my vision. Realizing what was happening, I grabbed my shield with my left hand and blocked the dagger that had been thrown at me.

A metallic sound rang as the assailant immediately started kicking the air to close the distance between us. When I leaped back to avoid the attack, he shifted his focus towards the human soldiers and created a sea of blood in a matter of seconds.

“Sasuke-oniisan!!”

Utter horror could be heard in Chiome’s voice as she witnessed Sasuke’s actions.

He seemed to react to her calling his name, as he turned to her like an expressionless ghost.

Before anyone could do anything, a loud roar was heard overhead before a large figure fell to the pavement.

I used Dimensional Step to fall back when I noticed the danger.

The six-meter tall giant had brought down its weapon where I had standing moments ago, pulverizing that section of the stone street.

That was dangerous, I had almost been almost trampled like a flower.

The giant roared again and swung its stone axe towards Sasuke. However, Sasuke managed to dodge the attack with ease and kicked the air until he reached a nearby roof and disappeared.

“Wait! Sasuke-oniisan!!”

Chiome ran into a nearby alleyway and jumped onto the roof before heading in the same direction Sasuke went.

Ariane anxiously watched as Chiome disappeared, but shifted her gaze between her, the giant and me.

“Ariane-dono follow her! I’m more than enough to deal with this guy!”

Ariane nodded her head at me before she disappeared in the same alleyway that Chiome had gone into.

The only combatants left were the giant and me.

The giant brandished its weapon and looked down at me. Since it didn’t have a neck, its large black eyes shifted to down to look at me, making me feel a little uncomfortable.

I carefully watched the giant as it raised its axe and tightened my hold on my

sword.

As I prepared to activate a certain skill, it began to release light.

“Sword of Judgment!”

In an instant, a magic formation appeared beneath the giant’s feet just before a sword composed of light impaled the giant from the bottom up.

The sword of light was sticking out of the giant’s gaping mouth before it shattered like glass and dissipated. The giant’s body trembled tremendously as the light fragments scattered.

“Hmm, while the fur is rather tough, the backside is still a weakness.”

I started to leave the square as the giant fell behind me without anything to support it. However, I caught sight of a little boy watching from behind a collapsed building.

After sheathing my sword as I slowly approached the boy who fearfully held onto a wooden plank in an attempt to fend me off.

There was a woman lying behind the boy who not only had a bleeding head injury, but her foot was trapped under a piece of rubble as well.

“.....Listen to me, you have to escape..... even if it’s by yourself.”

The woman, probably the boy’s mother, was feebly pleading with him. However, the boy only tightened his grip on the wooden plank and adamantly refused to leave with tears in his eyes.

“I can’t leave you behind, mother! I refuse to leave unless it’s with you!”

In the minds of the boy and his mother, I somehow became the villain in this situation. Apparently the boy seemed to consider me the same thing as those undead knights from a while ago.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Ponta uncoiled herself from around my neck, and while that would normally be

enough to earn me some degree of trust, it didn't happen here.

Therefore I had to rely on the secret tool I had tied to my waist. Turning away from the two, I began drinking some water from my canteen. Immediately after my first swallow, my vision blurred for a moment and I was hit with a sudden headache.

I suppressed it as best as I could and let out a large sigh. Those physical effects were probably caused by the release of my accumulated emotions that accompanied the return of my flesh and blood body.

The continuous battles with the giants must have made the backlash stronger than normal.

With another sigh, I faced the boy again and revealed my face.

“.....Oji-san are you human?”

The boy became confused as he stared at my long ears.

“I'm an elf. Do you know what that is? Elves are good a magic, and I can use it to heal people.”

A joyous expression appeared on the boy's face as I put my helmet back on.

“Can you heal my mother!?”

I approached the mother and silently nodded at the boy's question. When I used recover magic on the mother's head the bleeding stopped, and then I moved the rubble from atop her foot.

The foot had been broken and required stronger magic to heal.

“Oji-san, are you really an elf? I was taught that elves were schemers who stole their skills from god.”

When I heard the boy's words, I was completely taken aback.

He mostly likely learned that from the Hiruku religion's teachings.

“Hmm, well then boy, do you know any humans that could be considered shift

by others?”

When I asked that, the boy frowned and shook his head as he tried to remember something.

I wonder if anybody would recognize what I said.

“If one human steals something, would that mean all humans are thieves? If a mother stole something, would her son also be a thief? Is there a saying like that?”

“My mother didn’t steal anything and neither did I!”

The boy raised his voice in objection to my statement.

I finished casting recovery magic on the mother’s foot and nodded at the results. Everything would be alright.

“S-Sorry. Thank you very much.”

I shook my head at the mother’s display of gratitude and stood up.

“It’s relatively safe outside the city wall. You should be fine so long as you hide in the shadows and move slowly.”

The mother stood up unsteadily and lowered her head to me. The boy anxiously looked up at his mother as I cast recovery magic on him as a precaution.

“Protect your mother, little boy.”

The boy was amazed as he watched the lights created by the recovery magic and nodded at my words before walking his mother out of the square and disappeared.

Since this took longer than expected, I headed up on the rooftops to investigate.

Chapter 21: Sasuke and Chiome

Two figures ran across Tajiento's rooftops.

The young man in the lead was a member of the cat-eared race, wearing black clothes that covered his entire body. His red eyes and expressionless face gave him a wraith-like appearance.

A cat-eared girl chasing after him wore black clothes similar to the ones worn by the young man.

The girl's blue eyes never left the young man's back as she leaped from rooftop to rooftop.

The two were disciples who had trained together. When the girl's parents died, the young man took her in as his sister and she loved him like a true older brother.

The young man had been proud of his sister when she became one of the six great ninja's of the Blade Heart Clan..... However, as he was right now, Sasuke didn't remember anything about her.

Finally having been able to find him after his disappearance, it was discovered that he'd become an undead, a existence detested in this world.

An undead..... someone who no longer belonged to the world of the living. The envy they felt towards the living caused them to spread death wherever they went.

Nothing more than a soulless corpse.

However, the person reflected in her eye was the same one she always knew.

The scoldings they received from Hanzo-sama, the time times they ate pork miso soup together..... nothing had changed since then.

"Sasuke-oniisan! Wait!"

Chiome used her water ninjutsu to throw water shurikens at Sasuke's feet, but he simply leaped into the air and threw a wind blade in response.

However, Sasuke was caught off guard by the flame arrow that was shot at him from behind shortly after he landed.

“!?”

When he turned in the direction the arrow came from, he saw the figure of Ariane quickly approaching from a nearby rooftop.

The arrow of fire she had created closed in on Sasuke, but he easily avoided it with a slight movement, as if it hadn't affected him at all.

The Arrow of Fire swept ineffectively past Sasuke and hit the roof, the impact spreading countless pools of fire all around him, as a Lance of Fire suddenly fell straight out of the sky, trying to hit him from a blind spot.

Sasuke, who had been distracted by the Arrow of Flame, had a delayed reaction to the attack and was forced to escape the point of impact by kicking the air in awkward position.

When the spear hit the roof, the explosion knocked roof tiles into the air and created a large hole in the impact zone.

Confronted with Ariane's actions, Chiome started to shout.

“Ariane-dono, wait! That's my brother.....!”

Ariane gave Chiome a sharp look when the girl said that.

“Chiome-chan, you already know, don't you? The person you knew is already gone.”

Ariane's voice had a low and sharp tone to it as she looked directly into Chiome's blue eyes.

Chiome eyes flickered between Ariane and Sasuke as she contemplated what had been said.

She started to question her own hesitation. Sasuke took advantage of her confusion to draw the twin swords from his waist and attack her.



While she was able to dodge the first strike and fend off the second one with her dagger, Sasuke kicked Chiome in the stomach before leaping to the next roof.

“Hrng!”

Coughing up blood, Chiome could only fall down and absentmindedly watch as the distance between her and Sasuke widened.

Wisps of flame flickered all over Ariane’s body and transformed into multiple flame arrows that were shot at Sasuke’s back.

However, Sasuke kicked the air and dodged them while simultaneously pulling shuriken from his breast pouch before hurling them at her.

Sasuke’s forte was controlling the trajectory of projectiles.

Time seemed to slow to a near standstill as Chiome watched the shuriken approach her chest.

The gentle smile Sasuke had when she couldn’t hit the targets as he taught her how to throw a shuriken crossed her mind.

He would stay with her until sunset while they trained..... the perfect example of a senior disciple.

Whenever she sulked after being unable to land a single hit on her sparring partner, he would offer her a troubled smile. The face of Sasuke from back then was replaced with the indifferent-looking person in front of her.

The sound of metal clashing interrupted Chiome’s thoughts and the shuriken Sasuke had thrown fell to the stone pavement below.

“Chiome-chan!!”

Ariane’s shout returned Chiome to the present, and she noticed she was clenching her own dagger.

A tiny smile appeared on Chiome’s face as she realized she had reflexively blocked the shuriken.

Her blue eyes drifted from her dagger to the face of the red-eyed man in front of her.

The wind blowing between them carried the sound of a far-off conflict.

Ariane stepped between the two of them as she called out to Chiome again.

“Chiome-chan fall back! I’ll deal with him!”

However, the sudden appearance of two black giants caught all three of them off guard when their combined roar started rocking the entire area.

“”VuaawVuahahaaaaa!!””

The giants’ chest eyes all focused on Sasuke and they started to charge him with their axes raised above their heads.

The giant’s considerable weight collapsed the roof as they ran, causing them to fall into the building.

But the giants were so angry they simply began destroying the surrounding buildings with their axes.

As the building collapsed it produced an avalanche of rubble that affected the whole area.

As the giants fell along with the collapsing building, Ariane used her spirit magic to create a solid foothold out of earth, and Chiome leaped to another building moments before it came crashing down.

Sasuke had leaped into the sky and was now just standing in the air, observing the situation.

However, he immediately lost interest and began kicking the air to escape.

Suddenly a star-shaped shuriken was thrown at Sasuke from his blind spot and embedded itself into his foot.

When the foreign element entered his body, his balance was thrown off, causing him to fall on top of the rubble heap.

“Chiome-chan.”

Seeing what happened, ariane’s eyes widened in surprise as she looked at the person who had thrown that shuriken.

The one who had thrown that shuriken had been Chiome.

“Are you alright? Are you gonna be able to do this?”

Ariane worryingly called out to Chiome, but she simply shook her head and answered.

“I’ll do this. I am Chiome..... this is my duty as one of the six great ninjas. Ariane-dono, could you please restrict the giants’ movements for a while?”

Chiome had an awkward smile on her face as she asked Ariane for her support while the two giants freed themselves from the rubble.

“Alright. I’ll finish this quickly and come help you!”

Ariane spoke with a smile on her face before running up the mound of rubble.

A stone foothold formed beneath her feet as she ran, preventing her from losing balance.

Both her golden eyes were wide open as she drew her sword.

Her body began to produce lights that began to spread throughout the entire area.

The lights were various shades of vermilion, red and crimson that began to resonate as she started chanting again.

—Dance, burning flames; Scatter, burning flames; turn the souls of all things to dust—

As she spoke in the language of spirits, multiple red orbs began to float around her and gradually assumed the form of butterflies that fluttered around her.

Ariane approached the pair of giants with these fire butterflies in tow.

The giants began to wave their stone axes back and forth when they saw Ariane

approaching.

A giant dust cloud was kicked up when the giants slammed their axes into the ground.

While one of the giants was waiting for the dust cloud to clear up, its hand suddenly ignited like it was a torch.

Whaaaaawhaaaaa!!!

The giant fell down and began to roll back and forth on the mound of rubble, eventually smashing into a nearby building in the hopes that the rubble would extinguish the flames.

But the flames only continued to grow hotter and hotter and consumed more of the giant's arm.

The giant could only watch as the flames entered its mouth.

Before long the giant's eyes were withered away as it tried to scream, only to find that it couldn't due to all the fire butterflies that erupted from its mouth.

As the number of butterflies increased, their color became darker and they started to swarm around Ariane's sword as she waved it around like a baton.

Ariane's normally snow-white hair currently resembled a living flame since it reflected the color of the butterflies and was blown up by the wind.

As the remaining giant looked upon Ariane, he instinctively started to fear her.

The six-meter tall giant turned heel and tried to flee the area.

"You are but a mere beast, if you fear the flames!"

Ariane had a ghastly smile as she spoke and sent the butterflies after the fleeing giant.

Even though she had a serious battle of her own to fight, Chiome couldn't help but shiver at the thought of an angry Ariane when she caught sight of the flames at the edge of her vision.

Still, she had told Ariane that she would handle this alone.

She would put her former brother to rest with her own hands.

The peculiar odor of an open fire and burnt meat filled the area as the giants were reduced to ash.

Chiome slowly breathed in and out to allow her five senses to sharpen.

The layout of her surroundings appeared in her mind.

When she heard something cutting through the air she easily caught a shuriken that had been from within a dust cloud with her right hand.

It was the same shuriken that Chiome had thrown at Sasuke.

Shortly after she caught it, Sasuke leaped at her from the opposite direction the shuriken had come from.

However, Chiome had sensed his movements beforehand and was able to calmly fend off the blows from his twin swords with her dagger and tried to perform a counter attack.

Sasuke managed to deflect her dagger with one of his swords while simultaneously attempting to slash her undefended torso with his second sword.

In that moment, two water shuriken burst out from beneath the rubble and were heading towards Sasuke's legs. Sasuke managed to avoid one of the shurikens by launching himself into the air.

However, the second shuriken embedded itself into his leg.

It was said that the undead didn't feel pain, but their movements would still be impaired when their bodies were damaged.

If their arm was broken, they couldn't lift anything, and even though they didn't feel pain, their legs would become useless if they were damaged enough.

It might've been just a scratch, and there was no change in expression, but its durability had definitely been decreased.

Chiome raised her dagger and locked eyes with Sasuke.

Something that couldn't be said crossed her mind..... although she knew she shouldn't think about it, she couldn't help but do just that.

Chiome cast aside such thought by shaking her head and focused on her enemy again.

Water Style: Water Wolf Fang!!

Water began to pool at her feet and quickly assumed the form of two wolves.

However, these were smaller than the ones she had created in Rhoden's capital.

Her opponent was armed with two swords while she had only a single dagger, but with this technique she could occupy both his hands while keeping hers free.

Thinking this way, Chiome sicced the two wolves on Sasuke while slipping into the shadows to wait for an opportunity.

When the two water wolves leaped at him, Sasuke countered them with his swords.

Because the wolves weren't affected by common swords, Sasuke's first attack phased through the first wolf, but his second one caused one of the wolves to dissipate.

A faint light clung to the blade of Sasuke's sword while he himself was surrounded by a thin veil of wind.

He was capable of using wind ninja skills like he did when he was alive.

Noting that the sharpness of her enemy's sword had increased, Chiome positioned the remaining wolf so that they could launch a pincer attack against Sasuke. Just as the water wolf began to charge him from behind Sasuke dodged the attack and slashed at the wolf with one of his swords.

However, Chiome altered the water wolf's trajectory as she stepped forward and threw another shuriken at Sasuke. Sasuke managed to avoid the projectile by twisting his body and proceeded to cut down the wolf that tried to approach him

from his blind spot.

As he raised his sword after finishing off the wolf a smaller water wolf ran up his arm and bit into his neck.

The wolf's diminutive size prevented it from inflicting a decisive blow, but Chiome had expected this and used the opportunity to throw her dagger at Sasuke's face.

While Sasuke was able to fend off the attack, he failed to realize that Chiome had ran behind the dagger and was able to get a hold of his injured leg.

For a moment, Chiome and Sasuke's respective blue and red eyes meet.

Water Style: Bloody Needle!!

Chiome's ninjutsu formed a pointed cone that launched itself into Sasuke's wounded leg.

Sasuke's leg immediately started to swell and become misshaped while multiple water needles began to pop up all over his body, giving him a hedgehog-like appearance.

When blood began to mix into the clear water, Sasuke's body convulsed wildly. After the water needles disappeared he simply collapsed on the ground.

Tears began to collect in Chiome's eyes as she looked down at Sasuke's unmoving figure.

".....Sasuke, onii-san. Why didn't you use any other ninjutsu....."

Normally, Sasuke would have had access to more wind ninjutsu than the ones he used here, but he only used basic techniques such as wind walking and sharpening the edges of his swords.

Even in her present condition, Sasuke was someone Chiome couldn't normally have defeated.

There was slight movement behind Sasuke's eyelids and he suddenly started speaking in a hoarse voice.

“..... My precious little..... sister..... I could..... ne-never cut you down.....”

His voice was barely audible and should have been overshadowed by the nearby fires. However, Chiome easily recognized the voice of her beloved brother.

“Onii-san.....! I’ll get Arc-dono to heal you immediately!”

Chiome shed tears as she tried to stand.

But Sasuke used what little strength he had left to stop her with a head shake.

Chiome began to sob hard as the meaning of his gesture sunk in.

“.....Don’t cry..... Mia..... By your hand..... I can finally die..... Thank you..... Thank..... you.”

“.....!Onii-san.....! *sniff*”

Chiome desperately tried to suppress her voice so she could hear what Sasuke said while she clung to his heavily injured body.

Sasuke managed a slight smile when her warmth surrounded him.

Even though his ability to move had vanished and his conscious slowly faded away, he felt a bit of relief looking at her through his half-closed eyes.

Sasuke’s body was already turning to dust and being to be blown away.

(..... The Church..... Watch..... out.....)

Though it was as faint as a whisper, Chiome had heard fragments of his final words.

“.....! Onii-san, what was that!? What do you mean!?”

Chiome’s eyes were wide as she looked down at her brother.

However, he could no longer answer her. Sasuke’s entire body had been reduced to dust and scattered by the wind.

All that remained in her hands was the slightly oversized diamond that shined with a kaleidoscope of different colors.

Chapter 22: Tajiento's Collapse ①

I sighed as I looked over the city of Tajiento from a building's roof.

“Just where did Chiome-dono go? I have no idea.”

I occasionally used Dimensional Stepto investigate the nearby area while muttering complaints. I also took note of the multiple fires springing up all over the city.

Whenever I found one of the armored undead, I would attack them from the rooftop with magic, all the while wondering just how many of them there were. I've must've crushed more than a hundred of them by now.

I also killed another giant along the way.

While it was more difficult without any allies, victory was easy to obtain once I had an opening to use Sword of Judgement.

The effort was minimal, but the effects were optimal.

While I was thinking about things like that, Ponta suddenly started to bark.

“Kyun!”

“Hmm, what is it, Ponta?”

I looked around as I asked that question and found another giant.

Since I had a good view from the rooftops I could easily locate giants.

However, the situation on the ground was unknown for the most part.

Since most of the buildings in Tajiento were three stories tall, the six-meter tall giants couldn't hide in the buildings' shadow, but with my line of sight being reduced to one city block it was difficult to tell what was going on.

There were situations where a roof had been destroyed, impeding my progress.

Other times the roof would collapse under the weight of my armor and I would land in an attic.

I went totally silent as I observed the giant, and began to think running along rooftops in full-body armor wasn't the best idea.

With that thought in mind, I concentrated on the giant's exposed back.

"Dimensional Step!"

I covered about three-hundred meters to get within range of the giant's back and launched a preemptive attack.

"Sword of Judgement!!"

A sword of light appeared from beneath the giant's feet, impaling straight through its backside until the tip could be seen through its mouth.

When the sword of light shattered, the giant's body tilted forward and fell off the roof to the streets below.

But I could tell from here that it was still breathing a little. What vitality.

However, my worries were for naught since a group of armored undead arrived to deliver the killing blow.

".....I have no idea what these guys' objective is."

Initially, these armored skeletons had been attacking the soldiers and citizens of Tajiento.

My first impression had been that they were attacking Tajiento, using the commotion caused by the black giants that Chiome's friend Sasuke had lured to this place as a cover

There was the possibility that Sasuke himself had planned the assault on this city, but there was still the question of how he ended up becoming an undead after he disappeared.

The only thing I knew for sure was that he was Chiome's former companion.

If someone had brought both the giants and the armored skeletons into this city, they shouldn't have attacked each other.

There's still the possibility that things didn't go according to plan.

If you released both tigers and wolves to attack the same target, there was always a chance they would fight each other instead.

However, occasionally I would see a group of armored skeletons allow the citizens to pass by without attacking them.

Could they have been humans that were just wearing the same type of armor?

Still, I never hesitated at all to cast a spell against someone in armor whenever I saw them mercilessly cutting down humans or beastmen. Just what on earth is going on in this town?

After the armored skeletons had finished off the giant, they began searching for other prey.

I tore off a roof tile and dropped it in front of the group

The tile loudly shattered once it hit the stone street below. While it did catch their attention for a moment, they quickly continued moving down the street.

The way it looked like, there were no humans at all inside.

Although they reacted to the sound they didn't stop to confirm where the sound came from.

"This is just getting more and more confusing....."

I had to but that thought on hold when I heard the roar of another giant.

The sun had nearly set and dusk had already set in.

When the giant roared again, the screams of humans followed after it.

Ponta began to shake her tail furiously on top my head when she heard the giant's roar.

I turned my head in the direction Ponta was facing to locate the roar's source.

What I saw was a major street leading toward the center of the town that housed a large estate.

A huge compound that held two buildings which soared into the sky. While the structure and sizes were a bit different, the building reminded me of one I seen in the Eastern Empire, Leibnitz.

That building build was probably the Hiruku church. The memory of when I used summoning magic near one of those was still fresh in my mind.

There were several giants walking along the street leading to the church.

Even though they were the size of a wheat grain from here, there were people running away from the giants on that street. I looked away from them and glanced up towards the sky.

Once night completely set in it would become much more difficult to use transfer magic here.

My original purpose was to take advantage of the chaos in this city to free the beastmen slaves, but this city would suffer untold amounts of damage if this many giants were left to their own devices.

No, the damage had already been done and was continuing to spread. From here, I could see seven giants making their way toward the church.

After letting out a large sigh I raised the Sword of Holy Thunder and grabbed the Holy Shield of Teutates with my left hand and tested its weight.

“Kyun!”

Sensing the upcoming battle, Ponta quickly moved from atop my head and wrapped herself around my neck. Her tail ended up blocking my right eye, so I made a quick adjustment.

“Let's go...”

With one last sign, I invoked Dimensional Step and transferred to the roof of

a building close to the church and took a look around.

The church was probably the largest building in the city and surpassed the churches on the Northern Continent in terms of beauty.

The most distinctive part of this church had to be the tall wall built around it.

I haven't come across a walled off church in this world before. I remembered that churches were meant to have open and welcoming environments.

Well, this was a different world after all.

The church had probably been the designated evacuation site when the city was still being built.

The people that were chased by the giants rushed into the church's gate as pandemonium broke out around them.

The black giants that ran after the people would catch the slower runners and dance around as they threw them into their chest mouths. I could hear the unpleasant chewing from here.

Just watching this scene made me feel ill.

Those that fled inside the church's wall weren't able to find the safe haven they'd been looking for.

One of the giants who had been chasing the people swung its stone club down on the church's wall with all its might.

The screams were deafening.

The giant that collapsed the section of the wall began to trample the humans that had taken shelter there while laughing.

While I couldn't see what was going on that far beyond the wall, the screams and curses that reached my ears conveyed a vivid image.

When I looked down at my right hand I realized that I'd started trembling at some point.

This gruesome spectacle was frightening me. How?

When I remembered what I had done to help that little boy and his mother, I stabbed my sword into the roof, took off my helmet and touched my face.

There wasn't the usual coldness of hard bone there.

What I felt was definitely skin.

The effects of the hot spring's water were still active.

The reason I was freezing up..... was because my sense of fear had been restored along with my body. By restoring my body I'd cast aside my ability to act.

I started to clench my fist a few times to steady my nerves.

No matter what high specs my body had, they were useless unless I had to will to use them. A self-mocking chuckle slipped from my lips.

“Kyun?”

Ponta uncoiled herself from my neck and gave me a worried look.

“..... It's nothing, Ponta. This should be good experience. I've been training my heart should I ever come across an enemy in this state.....”

I attempting to comfort Ponta and myself when I said, then hit the sides of my helmet after putting it back on.

“.....Okay.”

Pulling the Sword of Holy Thunder out of the roof, I began to pick different skills and strategies to use in the upcoming battle.

I decided to attack the giant standing slightly apart from the others first.

The surprise attack was the basis of strategy after all.

..... Now that I thought about it, the first fight I took part in was the surprise attack I launched against a group of bandits.

While I had an abundance of abilities, I could only gradually acquired the experience necessary to use them.

I selected the spot behind the giant, raised my sword, and invoked my spell.

“Dimensional step!”

I transferred behind the giant, onto the roof of a nearby building, and tried to keep my sword steady enough to invoke a skill.

But before I could do anything, the loud voice of a male could be heard from the church.

Hahhahahhaa!! You have the audacity to break in my house and destroy it?!

The voice resonated in the bottom of my stomach, creating a strong feeling of uneasiness.

Even though the voice itself sounded rather childish, it only added to the eerie feeling.

“I was already furious!! Everything will be shredded!!”

After the weird and childish voice had spread through the area like a wave, another section of the church’s walls was suddenly blown away.

The people that had been running around chaotically to escape the giants, were now focused on the huge shadow that approached from the other side of the wall.

What emerged from the cloud of dust was an ugly, misshapen mass that joyously laughed as it began slaughtering the giants one after another.

Chapter 23: Tajiento's Collapse ②

If I had to describe it, I would say that the misshapen lump had a relatively scorpion-like form.

However, it was definitely not a scorpion.

Its pale body was ten meters long and composed of a flabby substance. Innumerable human faces covered the creature's entire body and they wailed in agony despite the condition they were in.

Countless pale bodies supported the creature's long form as well. The human feet grew out of the creature's body, just like cilia, somehow allowing its ten-meter tall body to slither across the ground with strange and winding movements.

There was a frog-like head elevated above the others and that seemed to be where the creature's voice had come from.

Behind the frog-like head were multiple, gigantic arms composed of numerous human arms that each held an iron ball and chain, large hatchets and other heavy weaponry.

This was the definition of a nightmare.

The next moment, countless arms with weapons in their hands were growing out of the creepy scorpion's back, all rushing towards one of the giants.

The very same giants whose hard fur prevented normal weapons from easily damaging them.

However, when the countless weapons struck the giant, it was instantly reduced to a mound of flesh, despite its desperate attempts to defend itself.

When the creature approached the dead giants it opened its large mouth, which was lined with countless teeth, and began to devour it.

The size of the giant wasn't an issue as the creature's mouth was like that of a

crocodile's, and it was long before I started hearing the gruesome chewing sounds.

For a moment I believed this creature had been summoned by a summoner like myself to protect the humans, but this world wasn't that nice.

In a somewhat sluggish manner, the deformed creature dragged itself towards the frightened people and proceeded to devour them.

Instead of an angel, a true monstrosity which was literally capable of swallowing giants had appeared from the church. The irrationality of the situation finally set in after witnessing that.

It could be said that panic was the appropriate response to all of this.

As the humans began to scatter, the deformed monstrosity spoke in a leisurely voice.

This body gets hungry quickly

While spewing such easygoing words, the deformed monstrosity began dragging people into its mouth like a whale consumed krill.

It was an eat-what-you-caught situation.

Meanwhile, the remaining giants attacked the monstrosity one after another, but just like the humans that had escaped into the church, they ended up in its gut.

It seemed like the agonized faces on the monstrosity's body had increased.....

The pale lump of meat eerily squirmed along while eating the humans and giants, the frog-like head chuckling the entire time.

"Kyh"

My mind finally rebooted when Ponta's worried cry caused me to look down at her.

"Sorry, Ponta."

A group of armored skeletons, which had chased after the fleeing people,

appeared in the plaza only to be immediately trampled by the deformed monstrosity.

For the time being, I've seen enough of this monstrosity.

Even the tiger tribesmen wouldn't be able to oppose it.

I had to seize the opportunity before it became aware of me.

I raised the Holy Thunder Sword as pale lights began to gather around the blade and swung it down.

Sword of Judgement!

The monstrosity's attention was focused elsewhere, so I thought I could kill it in one blow.

Even though I put enough power into the attack to penetrate the monstrosity's body, the monstrosity managed to quickly scuttle away when the large magic formation appeared underneath it .

Without a target, the sword of light simply shot into the sky.

So that large body was capable of such movements.

It moved as if someone had put its body on an electric wheelchair and stuck a frog-like head on top of it .

..... like an out of control go-cart.

While cursing in my heart, I tried to launch my next attack, but the monstrosity detected me faster than expected.

The huge figure quickly turned around in place.

Everyone interferes with my peace! Everyone! I'll break everyone!!

While the strange voice whined like an upset child, its innumerable feet moved in a wriggling wave as it ran towards me. I've been found out.

The numerous arms stretched out from the monstrosity's back in an attempt to

smash me.

“Holy Shield of Light!”

I held my shield up and activated a defensive skill.

The monstrosity’s weapons reached me at that exact moment.

While defending with my shield, I began cutting off arms with my sword.

Since the monstrosity’s body was composed of pale lumps of flesh, it lacked the resistance of the giants’ hides, so regular attacks worked just fine.

“Impertinence! Impertinence!! Impertinennnnnece!!”

As the monstrosity continued to shout in that strange tone, its irritation growing, it began closing in on me as if it wanted to crush me.

The monstrosity lost sight of me when I used my transfer magic to dodge him, and its body shook while it looked for me.

..... His sight seemed to be fixed and it couldn’t look around unless it turned its body.

Realizing that I could slip into the gaps in its vision and attack it from behind, I launched another attack at the monstrosity’s back.

I raised my sword again and invoked another skill..... a fast and short-ranged technique.

“Holy Light Slash!”

Raising my light-clad sword over my head, I slashed downwards and a beam of light flew in a straight line at the monstrosity, blowing off some of the feet that were supporting the monstrosity’s body. A pained wail echoed through the area followed.

Unfortunately, it recovered immediately and turned around to face me.

..... Its movements were unpleasant every time I saw them.

The monstrosity cursed repeatedly as it readied its numerous arms, apparently not wanting to give me a chance to act.

Bad! Bad!! So annoying!!! Who are you!!?

While the frog-like head ranted and raved, it shoot its numerous arms towards me.

I dodged the assault and fired the Destructive Holy Sword again but only managed to destroy a few of its feet as the monstrosity dodged the attack.

Worst of all, the damaged flesh started to bubble up and before long new feet grow in place of the lost ones.

While it's regeneration wasn't fast, it wasn't that slow either.

In the game, enemies that had abilities like this monster usually required a party to deal with: some members would stop it from regenerating while others continue to attack and daze the enemy, but I was by myself.

It was like challenging an end game dungeon boss on your own.

There was a simple solution though, I just needed to constantly attack this guy and overwhelm its regeneration with pure damage.....

I avoided the monstrosity's arms while I pondered just how i could accomplish that.

I'd cut off several arms already, but their numbers didn't seem to decrease at all.

..... This wasn't going well, maybe I should retreat and prepare another strategy?

I looked around the area as I desperately tried to think of something.

Darkness had already covered the area as dusk gave way to night, limiting the effectiveness of transfer magic.

There was no helping it, though I didn't want to do this often, I had to use an overwhelming assult.....

I used transfer magic to put enough distance between us.

“Ponta! Sorry, but you’re gonna have to fly away for a while!”

“Kyun? Kyun!”

Ponta was momentarily confused by my command, but she still unwrapped herself from around my neck and flew into the air with her wind magic. This was for the best.

After looking up at her, I turned towards the monstrosity.

Having prepared myself, I used a certain summon for the first time after arriving in this world.

“Come forth, keeper of eternity! Aion!!”

A huge magic formation made from turning, mechanical clockwork began to shine in front of my feet.

A giant snake with the head of a lion began to emerge from the magic formation.

The lion-headed snake slowly coiled itself around my legs and started to crawl up my body.

When the lion head reached my shoulder it opened its mouth to reveal a sharp set of fangs and proceeded to bite into my neck.

At the same time, the serpentine body turned into a strange pattern that fused into my armor, wrapping my body in a cascade of different colored lights.

Aion was one of the highest tier summons a summoner could acquire.

Its rather unique and special ability allowed it to freeze a player’s current state for three minutes the moment it was summoned.

The three-minute-state-freeze was difficult to explain... simply put, my current condition would remain unchanged no matter what happened to me in the next three minutes.

In other words, my health wouldn’t decrease no matter how many attacks hit me

and my mana wouldn't drop not matter how many spells I used, making me effectively invincible.

However, this didn't mean it was actually as useful as it sounded.

First, a summoner had to reach a considerably high level before they could even acquire the summon. Even after going through all kinds of hardship to acquire it, it was difficult for the summoner to actually make use of this summon.

The main problem was that a summoner could only have one active summoned beast at any time.

Even if you became invincible and could use other magic, a summoner couldn't bring out a combat-orientated summon. Furthermore, the mana costs to summon Aion was incredibly high. Even if one had an intermediate magic-using class as their secondary class, their mana would be depleted once the three minutes passed.

For those reasons, the only way to use Aion effectively was to use it in combination with a class that had powerful skills..... In other words, you had no choice but to have a class of the highest tier in tandem with the summoner class.

Unfortunately, the game didn't allow you to use the skill of all the classes that a player had obtained at once. With the summoner class required as the main or secondary class, one need to have an offensive character build to utilize these particular summon to its fullest.

You could call it the summon of abolishment.

"I'll finish you off quickly!! There won't a speck of dust left behind!!"

I raised my sword and shield as the monstrosity's numerous feet dragged itself towards me.

Even though Aion was supposed to prevent me taking damage, I didn't know how that'd work in reality.

While being overconfident was prohibited, ignoring some lesser attacks was a sound strategy.

So I let some of the monstrosity's arms pass through my defenses.

I only felt the small shock of the weapons the arms held hitting me as the blow connected..... so the summon was working without a problem.

However, I didn't know how exactly much time had passed since I summoned it, so I didn't have the entire three minutes to use.

It would be bad if I was still weathering the brunt of the enemy's onslaught when the effect ran out.

"Evil Sealing Holy Sword!!"

Even so, I could chip away as much of my enemy's health as possible until then.

With that in mind, I activated one of the Holy Knight skills which caused my sword to glow.

I swung my sword while still weathering the monstrosity's onslaught.

A streak of light trailed behind the sword's blade as it evaporated a section of the monstrosity's body.

Aghaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

While the skill I used had the greatest effect on undead, it seems to be effective on the monstrosity as well.

Since this was multiple times more effective than normal attacks, repeatedly using magic attacks was the best strategy.

Essentially, that was the strategy a player would use while having Aion summoned, but I had something a bit different in mind.

The monstrosity stepped backed in an attempt to protect itself, but I launched my next attack without giving it that chance.

"Face your destruction! Smite the Wicked!!"

When I invoked one of the Pope class's areas of effect skills, a large shining magic formation appeared in the sky above the monstrosity, like Jacob's ladder,

before a cross-shaped beam of light fell upon it.



“Aghaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

The monstrosity began to scream as its entire body started to evaporate.

Unable to withstand the pain, the monstrosity fell on his back like a brick, killing several giants that had approach the area from that direction.

One of the church’s wall collapsed when the monstrosity’s body collided with it.

However, I didn’t let up my assault there.

I hammed the monstrosity’s body with Evil Sealing Holy Sworduntil Smite the Wicked cool down passed and I could cast it again.

By the time the lion-headed snake pattern disappeared from my armor, the monstrosity had been reduced to a lump of melted flesh.

With the majority of its body deteriorated, what remained was a cluster of countless corpses fused together.

“Kyun!”

“Hah, that was tiring.”

Ponta landed on my head just as I averted my gaze from the monstrosity’s remains and surveyed the area.

The church had been heavily damaged by the battle.

But the monstrosity was mostly to blame for that, seeing as it recklessly moved about. It was unavoidable.

While making excuses for myself, I looked back at the monstrosity’s corpse.

Although I’d defeated it, just what in the world was that thing?

In any case, finding Ariane and Chiome was more important than any of my unanswered questions right now.

As I left the premises, I felt the eyes of the citizens staring at me from the shadows.

Now that the immediate threat has been taken care of, I should join back up with my companions.

After looking up at the night sky, I put my sword over my shoulder and continued to walk.

Silver Note:

Aion: a Hellenistic deity of eternity, specifically unbound time, which is removed from the regular flow of time. He's associated with a single serpent warping around a staff or the ouroboros.

Causality: The natural or worldly agency or efficacy that connects one process with another process or state, where the first is partly responsible for the second. Basically, since the dawn of time causality has been the basis for all understandings of how the world works.

Arc's summon basically bitch slaps causality and makes him onto a god. For three minutes his everything proof, even to his own actions.

Epilogue

The Holy Leburan Empire, of the eastern region of the Northern Continent.

The Imperial capital of Habaren was truly the center of this large nation, thanks in no small part to the several major highways that connected it to the rest of the nation.

Currently, a heavily armed squadron was traveling down the southeastern highway.

There were a few mounted troops leading the group, but the squad was mostly composed of infantry who guarded the horse-drawn carriage and the numerous carts that followed it.

Their squadron marching down the highway created a truly grandiose sight.

Near the center of the group was a luxurious four horse-drawn carriage.

The black carriage was adorned with the crest of the Valetiafelbe imperial family, the current rulers of the empire.

However, only two maids rode in the luxurious carriage, the emperor was nowhere to be seen inside.

Far ahead of the nearly empty luxurious carriage a thirty man cavalry equipped with excellent saddles carried on unobscured.

Within this group, one man grasped the reins of a marvellous black horse.

A young red-haired rider wore a slightly less ornamental military uniform than the other cavalryman in the formation.

His name was Domitianus Leburan Valetiafelbe.

The young emperor of the Holy Leburan Empire.

A large middle-aged man rode up next to Domitianus and spoke into the emperor's ear with a worried expression on his face.

"Your Majesty, is this really alright? Despite being within our own territory, what if an assassin ambushes us while you're still out in the open?"

Domitianus simply chuckled when he heard that.

"Like you said, we're still in our territory. There's no need to be so nervous. Besides, the box back there has a large name tag on it, who would expect that I'd be mixed in with the soldiers? Hehehe."

"No, that's,hmm, I suppose so."

The middle-aged man struggled to say anything against the emperor's statement.

Domitianus simply shrugged his shoulders at the man's worries.

"Staying inside that carriage is rather tedious. Besides, my well being is what you're here for, right?"

The emperor's smile became more mischievous as he looked towards the middle-aged man.

"Yes! Of course Your Majesty! We well stake are lives on....."

When the man tried to Domitianus bow his head while still on horseback, the emperor thrust his rider's crop into his throat.

"Stop Stop. Do you intend to give me away? Hihihhi"

The man slightly bowed his head as the emperor laughed at him.

As a way to change the topic, the man glanced back of the forces behind them.

"It's quite amazing that the army had twenty-two thousand troops to spare....."

The emperor smiled at the man's statement and nodded his head.

"I am personally ensuring that the Tishen campaign is going well. That old man of the west has his ass rooted to his chair and would never venture onto the

frontline. It is time to put an end to him.”

The surrounding people nodded at the emperor’s statement.

However, the middle-aged man only groaned.

“General Keling of the southern army will come first.....”

“Hehehe, It’s been a while. I’ll be sure to bring his head back to Verumoas as a gift for looking after the capital.”

Domitianus’ hand fell to the sword at his waist as he floated a fearless smile after making that declaration.

The emperor had just implicated that he would kill the general with his own hands.

The middle-aged man toward away for the brave young emperor and looked towards the western sky and the battles to come.

“Even if twenty-thousand soldiers join the army, it will still be a difficult fight.”

“Hmm, the current operation should have gotten Aspania to move. Those guys should have taken the opportunity to test the bounds on their side. The West can not afford to move their other armies for the time being.”

Once the conversation was over, the corners of emperor Domitianus’ mouth rose as he looked towards the far-off battles.





The majority of humans on the Northern Continent followed the Hiruku religion.

The person standing at the top of the religion was the Pope of the Hiruku Theocracy. The theocracy was surrounded by the Delfrent, Nozan, and Salma Kingdoms and was separated from the Great Leburan Empire by a narrow channel.

The Hiruku Theocracy's capital had been built at the base of Mt. Arthus of the Rooteos Mountain Range, mainly for the ease of access to the massive mithril deposit the mountain housed.

A massive cathedral that had been built atop the overlooking cliff that rested halfway up Mt. Arthus.

It was referred to as the Arthus Cathedral.

This cathedral acted as Pope Thanatos Shirubiwes Hiruku's residence.

However, the number of those allowed to set foot on the sanctuary's grounds was extremely limited.

The luxurious decoration of the cathedral's interior showed off the church's strength..... a certain room built in the back of the cathedral was particularly gorgeous.

The ceiling was three times higher than one of a common house, every inch of the floor was covered by an embroidered carpet and each piece of furniture had been handcrafted by skilled artisans.

The centerpiece of the room was a large circular table which had six people in luxurious attire sitting at it and talking amongst themselves.

"Apparently, Cardinal Industria, who had had been placed in charge of the Tajiento colony on the Southern Continent, was slain."

The latest speaker, who was a man in his thirties, had a rather mild smile on his face, black neatly trimmed hair, and wore heavy, modified priest robes.

He was none other than cardinal Palermo Avaritia Liberalitas.

In the Hiruku Theocracy, those who received one of the seven cardinal names worked directly beneath the Pope, and this man had received the name Liberalitas.

However, he wasn't the only cardinal present.

A considerably well-built man snorted his nose at Liberalitas' comment.

He was around hundred and ninety centimeters tall, blonde stubble grew on his face, and his physique made one believe he wore a military uniform instead of the robes that he was actually wearing.

However, his expression was haggard and large bags rested under his eyes.

"Hmph..... Charos was the weakest amongst us..... To be defeated by a nobody only brings shame to the cardinals. That man was always unmotivated anyway. Since the seat of Industria is vacant, I'll advise the Pope to place a more capable person into it."

The man that voiced his complaints was cardinal Marcos Invidia Humanitas.

The only woman in the room chuckled his suggestion before speaking.

"Ara, are you dissatisfied with the Pope's selections? Have you lost faith in the Pope's judgment?"

In spite of the woman's graceful features and blond hair, she wore revealing white clothes that emphasized her large breasts, and the hem of her skirt slid up to a nearly obscene level as she sat with one of her legs crossed over the other.

She looked into cardinal Humanitas' eyes with a captivating smile on her face.

"I did not mean it that way, I'm simply pointing out Charos' incompetence....."

Despite his large build, cardinal Humanitas struggled to come up with the right words while looking around the room, only letting out a relieved sigh after confirming Pope Thanatos wasn't here.

An old gray-haired man's wrinkles became more pronounced as he closed his eyes after watching the scene play out.

"Only those who can endure the blessings of the underworld can obtain the seat of a cardinal. There's no problem with his decisions, given the limited number of candidates. Even if current evidence suggest that the person selected couldn't meet the expectations of the status."

The man crossed his arms after speaking his piece was well into his fifties.

However, even though he wore luxurious priest robes, the hard-bitten muscle below the neckline hinted at a physique more impressive than Cardinal Humanitas

His name was Cardinal August Ira Paciencia.

Cardinal Humanitas was openly angered by that remark.

"What!? Are you implying that I'm not fit to hold my seat!?"

"Nobody said that. Is there something we're unaware of that would make us think that?"

Cardinal Paciencia calmly asked that question after closing his eyes.

"How about we stop this particular conversation for now? You muscle-heads will continue back and forth with this if we let you. In any case, I'm interested in the white and silver knight who defeated Charos."

The sharp-tongued individual that broke off the argument was, in stark contrast to the other two men, a slender man wearing black rimmed glasses. That, combined with his shaved head, made him seem the most befitting of the robes he wore.

This man was Cardinal Bart Superbia Humilitas.

While fiddling with the dull iron ring he attempted to turn the conversation towards the man that killed Charos.

"Fine, do as you please!"

“Hmph!”

Both Cardinal Paciencia and Cardinal Humanitas directed their anger towards Humilitas, while Cardinal Castitas shrugged her shoulders and brought up another topic.

“By the way, what is it you have been messing around with?”

Despite her speaking in a flirtatious manner, Cardinal Humanitas paid it no mind, instead, showing great pleasure from receiving the question itself.

“This? This is an item created in the Eastern Empire. They call it the Ring of Submission. These allow them to control monsters.”

Cardinal Humanitas’ explanation made Cardinal Castitas remember something about the location he had recently visited.

“Ah yes, Cardinal Humanitas did visit magisterium of the Holy Leburan Empire.”

“I personally visited them because those placed in charge weren’t doing all that well recently.”

After providing Cardinal Castitas with a satisfactory answer Cardinal Humanitas exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulder and looked at the five other people in the room.

His eyes stopped and focused one one person in particular.

“How long are you going to sit there eating?”

Cardinal Humanitas pushed up his glasses and called out to the boy that had been stuffing his face since the beginning of the meeting and hadn’t said a single word yet.

The boy was actually one of the several cardinals, Cardinal Tismo Gala Temperantia.

However, the boy only looked confused for a moment before resuming his meal without answering.

The other cardinal collectively shrugged their shoulders and sighed.

“You all seem to be getting along well.....”

A different calm voice was heard entering the room.

All six cardinals got up from the table and kneeled down when they heard the voice.

“You grace us with your presence, Pope Thanatos.”

The man’s, whose entrance had been undetected, nodded at the cardinals’ greeting before sitting down in an elevated chair at the round table.

The Pope wore a set of robes more spectacular than the cardinals wore and held a decorated scepter that represented his power.

On the Pope’s head sat a mitre with multiple holy symbols sewn into it that only he was allowed to wear. The mitre’s veil totally concealed the Pope’s face.

The six cardinals continued to kneel as the one that united the Hiruku Theocracy, Pope Thanatos Shirubiwes Hiruku, took his seat.

After looking down at the people gathered from behind his veil, Pope Thanatos began to speak.

“Everyone seems to be gathered. You should have already been informed that Cardinal Industria has been slain on the Southern Continent.”

The Pope paused for a moment to look around again before continuing.

“He still carried out his duties to the best of his abilities. The Tajiento territory of the Western Empire was heavily damaged, but considering that the destruction could have been potentially more devastating, we couldn’t have asked any more from him.”

A tired chuckle managed to slip past the veil.

The Cardinals were utterly surprised by this.

“The balance between the empires has shifted in favor of the east. It’s possible to

earnestly stimulate things in Delfrent, Nozan and Salma while this window remains open. Everyone, please.”

“We understand.

The Cardinals lowered their heads again and replied in unison.

The Pope nodded in satisfaction before getting up and leaving the room.

The Pope’s muffled laughter was the only sound to fill the corridor as he left the room.

“..... A big event has finally arrived. Hehehe.”

As the Pope’s laughter continued to leak out, it startled small bird in a nearby window and sending it flying into the sky above the mountain range.

However, dark clouds started to form over the Rooteos Mountain Range.